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THE CERTAINTY OF GOD

BY

JAMES GORDON GILKEY

A Faith for the New Generation

Secrets of Effective Living

The Certainty of God

THE CERTAINTY OF GOD

BY

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TO

MY MOTHER

WHO HAS MADE GOD A REALITY

TO ALL HER CHILDREN

Gift from Mrs. J. A. Blackburning 3-7-58

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FOREWORD

This is the third and last volume in a series which aims to interpret liberal Christianity to the thoughtful people of our time. These books have been written not so much to satisfy experts in theology as to help ordinary men and women find answers to the questions which arise repeatedly in everyday life. The first book, "A Faith for the New Generation," outlined the convictions now held by the liberal group within the church. The second book, "Secrets of Effective Living," attempted to apply this faith to the concrete problems of daily life and show how it could be made a means of inward, if not outward, victory. This last book considers questions about God which are being raised everywhere to-day, and which must be answered if distinctively religious beliefs are to persist among us.

The chapters in this volume have grown out

of the author's experience in discussing religion with students at many schools and colleges. He hopes, however, that the ideas suggested here will prove helpful not only to young people and those who work with them, but also to the ever-increasing number of mature men and women who find it difficult to answer their own questions about God.

JAMES GORDON GILKEY.

April, 1928,
Springfield, Massachusetts.

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THE CERTAINTY OF GOD

THE CERTAINTY OF GOD

Chapter I

DO WE REALLY KNOW THERE IS A GOD?

I

Some months ago two students were walking through a new dormitory at one of our eastern colleges. Along the wall in the corridor were several niches, designed for the busts of eminent individuals. One of the students paused before an empty niche, took a pencil from his pocket, and drew on the wall a huge question mark. His companion stared in surprise, and then asked innocently, "Who's that for?" "That," said the first student grimly, "is for God."

Great numbers of young people to-day share this uncertainty. For them God is a gigantic

question mark, little more. Was it He who made our world, or is the universe merely the product of blind force acting on inert matter and assisted by the steady elimination of everything unfit? Does God touch human lives, or is our sense of His presence merely a phantasy generated by a religiously inclined imagination? These are questions which thousands of students find themselves unable to answer. In the vivid phrase of Dr. Coffin, they are "wistful but unconvinced."

This skepticism is not limited to the colleges. Many older people are equally uncertain of God. Even when they are convinced of His existence they find themselves strangely baffled when they attempt to formulate ideas about His character and His purpose. Some years ago Dr. Henry Van Dyke described the religious situation of his day in this brilliant epigram: "The coat of arms of our age is an interrogation point rampant, above three bishops dormant, with the motto: I wonder." The interrogation point seems even more rampant now than it was then.

II

Why has this situation arisen? Why do the men and women of our time have so many doubts about God? The answer to those questions forms an interesting chapter in the history of thought. During the early centuries of Christianity men seem to have been quite willing to accept as true whatever the church told them about God. When the Athanasian Creed declared, "We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance," the ordinary man regarded those words as an accurate description of the Diety. When the same creed continued, "The Father is Almighty, the Son is Almighty, and the Holy Ghost is Almighty; and yet there are not three Almighties but one Almighty," the statement was accepted as indubitably true, however puzzling it might seem. Had not the divinely established church spoken, and how could a divinely established church make a mistake?

With the passage of time, however, more and more people found themselves unable to

take this attitude. The plain fact was that the church had made mistakes, and when these mistakes became so numerous and so obvious that there was no possibility of overlooking them, how could thoughtful people retain their confidence in the infallibility of ecclesiastical pronouncements? To-day belief in the church's authority is little more than the shadow of what it was a few centuries ago. If a teacher says to a skeptical student, "The church teaches this and that about God, and you ought to accept the church's statements even if you cannot understand them," the student stares at him in surprise. Does he propose to renew the old appeal to ecclesiastical authority? Does he not realize that it broke down at the time of the Reformation?

When the authority of the church began to wane, another external authority was developed to take its place. Men began to appeal to the words of the Bible, interpreted in a highly literal fashion. It seems strange to-day to discover how implicitly they trusted this new authority, and in what curious ways they used

it in their quest for truth. A Lutheran leader of the early seventeenth century made these extravagant claims for the Book of Genesis: "The text must be received strictly. It contains all knowledge, human and divine. The twenty-eight articles of the Augsburg Confession are found in it. It is also an arsenal of arguments against Atheists, Pagans, Jews, Turks, Tartars, Calvinists, Socinians, and Baptists. It is the source of all sciences and arts—including law, medicine, philosophy, and rhetoric. It contains the essence of all histories, professions, trades, and works." All that in the fifty chapters of Genesis! As long as men held such ideas about the Bible it was a simple matter to formulate doctrines about God and then insist that these doctrines were infallibly true. One had merely to search the Scripture, accumulate an array of proof-texts, and then arrange them in logical order. There was the truth about the unseen God.

But in the course of time the authority of the infallible Bible, like the authority of the infallible church, was undermined. A careful

study of the Scripture revealed the disconcerting fact that there are passages in the Bible which flatly contradict each other, and other passages which are demonstrably untrue. As this knowledge spread religious leaders found it more and more difficult to substantiate a particular doctrine about God merely by saying that it was found in the Bible. In our time it is utterly impossible to meet the questions and objections of skeptics by making insistent appeals to Scripture. The skeptics reply bluntly: "But the Bible is mistaken on scores of subjects. It may, for all we know, be mistaken in its ideas about God. In any case its teachings about Him are anything but consistent. How are we to reconcile the idea that God is love with the idea that He once told His people to go out and slaughter their enemies—men, women, and children? If you want to win us to faith in God, you must do more than quote proof-texts taken indiscriminately from the Bible."

As the practice of appealing to the church or to the Bible has thus been gradually aban-

doned a third form of external authority has been devised. In recent years religious leaders have been appealing to the statements of Jesus Himself. What did He say about God? What ideas did He hold about the divine character and the divine will? These leaders have insisted that, if we will only "go back to Jesus Himself" and then "take Jesus in earnest," we shall find a convincing and an authoritative answer to our modern questions.

Many of us have found these suggestions immensely helpful. Again and again we fortify our faith by reminding ourselves that the convictions we hold were those reached originally by Jesus. But it is only fair to point out that this appeal to Jesus, however satisfying it may be to those who are already firm believers in His teaching, does not satisfy the bewildered people we are trying to help. When we say to them, "Jesus taught this and that about God, and you ought to accept these ideas as true on His authority," they make this reply: "Students of the New Testament have now proved—beyond any reasonable doubt—that

Jesus was a man of His own time and that He accepted the dominant ideas of His own generation. He thought, as all the Jews of His day did, that David wrote the Psalms. He was convinced, as all first-century people were, that disease was caused by demons. He believed, as most of the men of His nation did, that the end of the age and the inauguration of a new world-order were close at hand. In all these points the people of that time, Jesus included, were mistaken. There is no honest way of dodging the fact. If some parts of Jesus' teaching thus prove untrue, how can you insist that we accept other parts? What if Jesus had false ideas about God, as He obviously had false ideas about evil spirits?"

Here are some of the difficulties we encounter when we attempt to answer modern questions about God. Here are some of the causes of the widespread skepticism of to-day. One by one the old authorities have proved—at least as far as the doubters are concerned—inadequate and unsatisfying. In such a situation how can we formulate ideas about God

which will approve themselves to men trained in the modern school of thought? Perhaps the procedure of scientists will suggest an answer. How do they go to work to discover truth?

III

In 1781 Sir William Herschel, the English astronomer, discovered the planet Uranus and several of its satellites. After watching its movements for some time he plotted the course he believed the new planet would follow. But for some unaccountable reason Uranus did not move in the path which had been predicted. Other astronomers checked Sir William's calculations but found no mistake in them. Then the facts of the situation, obvious to anyone who had the training and the equipment of an astronomer, forced the experts to formulate an ingenious hypothesis. They said that somewhere in space, beyond the reach of any existing telescope, was an undiscovered star which deflected Uranus from its normal orbit. Then they began figuring where this star must lie and what its magnitude must be to account for

the effects which were being produced. For sixty years these speculations continued. One astronomer, discussing the yet undiscovered star, wrote in 1846: "We see it as Columbus saw America from the shores of Spain. Its movements have been felt, trembling along the far-reaching line of our analysis, with a certainty hardly inferior to that of ocular demonstration." Then, in the very year in which those words were written, came the long-awaited discovery. A German scientist named Galle, gazing through a telescope equipped with new and more powerful lenses, caught clear glimpses of something never seen before —the planet Neptune. There it was, glimmering in the very spot where for sixty years astronomers had been insisting it must be. Curiously enough, detailed studies showed that its size and its distance from the Earth were almost exactly what had been predicted. What was the method these scientists followed as they searched for truth? They made no appeal to ancient authorities. They began by studying the facts—the irregularities in the orbit of Uranus. They then formulated a theory that

would account for the facts—the theory of an unseen star of a given magnitude in a given location. Then they waited until in a very literal sense faith gave way to sight.

Suppose in the difficult religious situation of to-day we follow some such procedure in our effort to find the truth about God. Suppose we drop the familiar and sadly overworked appeal to ancient authorities. Suppose we study the actual facts of life and experience, some of them in the world without and others in the world within. Then suppose we formulate theories about God which will fit the facts and (in a measure at least) account for them. Perhaps we shall be able to reach conclusions that are more extensive than might first appear. Perhaps we shall find that they correspond with the conclusions reached by other seekers after God, some the leaders of our own time and others the spiritual geniuses of the past.

IV

We might begin by studying the world without, the realm of Nature. Some of the facts disclosed there seem to imply, we must admit

frankly, that blind chance rather than a loving God stands at the heart of things. Consider, for example, the immense and constant suffering we find everywhere about us. Perhaps the first impression a study of the natural world makes upon us is one of universal and inexplicable pain. John Stuart Mill once wrote, "Nearly all the things for which men are hanged or imprisoned are Nature's everyday performances." The more we ponder those words the truer they seem. The processes of the natural world seem to pay scant attention to either intelligence or morality. A tornado sweeps blindly across a city, snuffing out a hundred lives and wrecking a thousand homes. Where is there anything intelligent or kindly about that? An earthquake rocks the most populous sections of Japan, burying beneath the débris a host of dead too numerous to be counted. Why such cruelty and pain?

When we turn to the realm of living creatures we find there too this same element of immense and constant suffering. We now

know that the different forms of life, all the way from the bacillus to the elephant, have reached their present status after an age-long battle for survival. We see to-day the relatively few victors in that struggle. The millions of losers were crushed out long ago in agony and death. "Throughout the long period during which life has existed on the earth, a period of incalculable duration, the vast army of living creatures has been in a state of unceasing battle, fear, and pain. More than half the species which have finally survived are parasitic in their habits, feasting on other forms of life. Everywhere in the realm of Nature we find teeth and talons whetted for slaughter, hooks and suckers molded for torture. Everywhere we see a reign of terror—sickness, hunger, battle, and death." [1] Situations like these certainly do not suggest a wise and loving God. Rather they imply a non-intelligent and non-moral order of things.

Or consider a second fact about the physical universe which is quite as strange. We now

[1] G. J. Romanes.

know that the vast process of evolution is itself a confused and somewhat blundering affair. A generation ago people felt that all the different life-processes led carefully up to man, and that in the emergence and development of the human species a unified and consistent cosmic purpose became evident. But the more accurate science of to-day draws no such simple and complimentary picture. We are now driven to the conclusion that our universe is "an empire with many kingdoms," and that the human realm is only one (and perhaps a minor one) of these principalities. One of the ablest scientists of our time writes: "The present theory of evolution does not teach that man is the goal of all evolutionary processes. Rather he is merely the present end of one particular series of evolutionary changes. Many a highly perfected creature has reached the goal of its evolutionary course and then perished because it could not meet the demands made by further changes in the environment. Many evolutions have therefore been finished, while others are apparently waiting an opportunity

to speed up toward some new goal." [2] Life, then, is no simple and perfectly proportioned pyramid with the innumerable lower species forming its broad base and man its proud apex. Rather life resembles those curious clumps of vegetation that hang in florists' windows, and send out shoots of many forms in many different directions. While our human species continues its development the slow stars have their evolution too. What possible connection is there between their cycle and ours? While humanity's growth continues there is a parallel process of development among the invisible microbes that may at any moment launch a deadly attack upon us. In their case it is power to kill rather than power to help which guarantees survival. What evidence is there in these situations of a wise and loving Father, ordering aright the affairs of His human children?

Confronted by newly discovered facts like these many of the educated people of our time abandon the old faith in a God of intelli-

[2] H. H. Newman.

gence and love. These men and women feel that our universe and the situations within it can best be explained on the theory that blind force and sheer coincidence have been and still are in control. Some individuals, accepting this interpretation of life and the universe, maintain a brave confidence in the future and an obvious joy in the present. Others lapse into the despair so vividly pictured by James Thomson:

The world rolls round forever like a mill,
It grinds out death and life and good and ill,
It has no purpose, mind, or heart, or will.

While air of Space and Time's full river flow
The mill must blindly whirl, unresting so;
It may be wearing out, but who can know?

Man might know one thing were his sight less dim,
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
That it is quite indifferent to him.

Nay, doth it use him harshly as he saith?
It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,
Then grinds him back into eternal death.

V

But there is another side to the picture pre-

sented by the natural world. When we have admitted that elements of pain and apparent irrationality are there, we must go on to point out that we also encounter elements of a different type. Consider, to begin with, the evidences of orderliness apparent on every side. Time and again the realm of Nature gives clear indications of arrangement, precision, and apparent adjustment of means to end. One of our American astronomers, reminding us that there are between one and two thousand million stars in our galaxy, and that there are other similar galaxies further off in space, makes this interesting comment: "To an astronomer the most remarkable thing about the stellar universe is not its vast extent in space, nor the long periods of astronomical time, nor the violent forces that operate within the stars. The thing which strikes the astronomer with awe is the perfect orderliness of celestial phenomena. From the tiny satellites of the solar system to the vast galaxy of our stars and the other galaxies beyond, there is no sign of chaos. There is nothing haphazard, nothing capri-

cious. The orderliness of the universe is the supreme discovery of science." [8]

How are we to account for a situation like that? It seems unreasonable to say that such an orderly universe could be the product of blind energies working fortuitously. Such energies might produce a chaos, but hardly a system characterized by "perfect orderliness." A more logical deduction would seem to be that somewhere within our universe a Vast Intelligence is at work, and that the element of order found within the natural world represents its activity. This Mind at the center of things is the reality we call God.

Here is another impressive situation we discover as we study the physical universe. Whenever the life-process reaches certain levels of development there emerges within living creatures a peculiar quality we call intelligence. The creatures that possess this quality—even in a rudimentary degree—seem to rise above the purely mechanical level, the level of rigidly

[8] F. R. Moulton, *The Nature of the World and of Man*, p. 80.

determined reactions. These creatures, all the way from the lower animals up to man, promptly proceed to create their own environment and by so doing regulate both the stimuli that come from without and the responses that waken within. Here are two illustrations from the notebook of one of our ablest modern biologists:

> The water-spider breathes dry air, but hatches her eggs under water in shallow pools. How are the young spiders to be given their first breath of air? The mother spider weaves a flat web of silk on the bottom of the pool, mooring it carefully to the stones. Then she goes up to the surface, entangles air-bubbles among the tiny hairs on her body, comes down again under the water, and presses those air-bubbles off with her legs under the silken web. Again and again she does this until that flat web, pumped full of air, is buoyed up like a silver cupola. Within that tiny diving-bell the nest is made, the

eggs are deposited, and the young spiders are hatched.[4]

The other incident is even more striking:

> The trap-door spiders that sink their tiny shafts in clay banks in the Riviera country reveal amazing ingenuity in the construction of their homes. The lid of the shaft, perhaps an inch across, fits precisely and works on a hinge formed from threads of silk. The shaft is smoothly plastered within, and sometimes there is a second shaft into which the spider can retreat if an enemy succeeds in entering the main shaft. In some cases we can clearly distinguish on the inner surface of the lid three or four little holes close together and about the size of pin-pricks. These are holes into which the spider's claws can fit when it is necessary to draw the lid down quickly. These holes had to be made of course when the clay from which the lid was formed was still soft.[5]

[4] J. A. Thompson, *Science, Old and New,* pp. 265-266.
[5] Ibid.

As we mount higher in the scale of living creatures we find this quality of intelligence becoming steadily more impressive. By the time we reach man it has developed to a degree that seems incredible. What shall we say, for example, about the scientist who has recently perfected a microphone so sensitive that it will record the sound made by the feet of a fly scampering across a newspaper? The emergence of this quality of intelligence is a situation that demands an explanation, just as the permutations in the orbit of Uranus demanded one. It is hard to believe that intelligence could appear in a universe created by blind energy working on inert matter. Such a theory would imply that intelligence could develop out of non-intelligence, and everything in human experience protests against such a view. It would seem more reasonable to say that within our universe a Vast Mind is at work, and that it is the ultimate source of the intelligence we find emerging in so many forms whenever the life process reaches certain levels of development.

Here is one more striking situation we discover as we study the world and its long history. The life-process reveals an unmistakable and a fairly consistent forward movement. Granted that there are occasional setbacks in the stream of progress, that some evolutions have apparently stopped, and that others move forward in directions curiously hostile to man. When all is said, the life-process as a whole reveals movement, and movement that is consistently in the line of greater power, greater freedom, and greater ability to control the environment rather than be controlled by it. Look back, for example, to the first bird some fifty million years ago. It is an awkward creature, running clumsily along a strip of sand between the sea and the primeval forest. It still has scales, teeth, and a tail like those of its lizard ancestors. Its forelimbs however bear a slight web, a web that is destined to develop during the course of centuries into that immensely complicated yet effective flying mechanism we call a wing. That first bird flaps its forelimbs as it runs,

and occasionally ventures to make a leap and skim a little way through the air. Now turn to the sea gull of to-day, with its perfected development. What a change! The life-process has not been wandering aimlessly in circles, bustling for some fifty million years but arriving nowhere. It has moved consistently forward, and finally given the sea gull of to-day a power, a freedom, a control over the environment which the first bird never imagined.

Are we to say that the law of the survival of the fit produced unaided this result? Granted that the law of the survival of the fit is the mechanism by which this result was attained. It is hard to believe that a law like this, so fraught with possibilities of blessing, could happen into existence and then happen to apply itself to a life-process which had also set itself up by chance. A more reasonable theory would be that a Vast Mind is at work somewhere in our universe, that this Mind is responsible for the insistent forward movement we see in the life-process, and that it de-

vised the steering mechanism by which this movement guides itself in a consistent direction.

When we turn to the story of the human race this record of progress is even more striking. Here the development has been not only in the direction of greater freedom and power, but also in the direction of finer moral and spiritual values. An unintelligent growth process, pushing forward blindly, would hardly reveal such appreciation of beauty and virtue. "Out of a primitive chaos where physical forces snarled at each other in unrelieved antagonism, where as yet no man had arisen to love truth and serve righteousness, something has brought us to a time when for all our evil there are gentle mothers and music and the laughter of little children at play. Something has brought us to a time when there are men who love honor, and who for Christ's sake will lay down their lives in the service of the brethren. Something has brought us to a time when there are homes in every obscure street where fortitude and devotion are splendidly

exhibited. Out of a primitive chaos where an observer (could there have been one) would have seen no slightest promise of spiritual achievement, something has brought us the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and growing achievements in social righteousness." *

How are we to explain situations like these? They are as evident to trained observers as the irregularities in the orbit of Uranus were evident to the astronomers. Some of us have been forced by the facts themselves into faith in a Living God, a Creative Intelligence working at the heart of things. Granted that there are some situations about us which we cannot explain. There are other situations—and they seem more numerous and more significant—which have an implication that can hardly be missed. It is the implication of a real God. Skeptics may say that He is only the phantasy of a religiously inclined imagination. But to us He seems real, as real as that planet Neptune lying beyond the range of human vision.

* H. E. Fosdick.

Shining there for centuries, waiting to be discovered.

Over the great city
Where the wind rustles through the parks and the gardens
In the air, in the high clouds brooding,
There I am.
Think not because I do not appear at first glance,
Because the centuries have gone by
And there are no assured tidings of me,
That therefore I am not there.
Think not because all goes its own way
That therefore I do not go my own way through all.
The fixed bent of hurrying faces in the street
Each turned toward its own light and seeing no other,
Yet I am the light toward which they all look.
The toil of so many hands toward such multifarious ends,
Yet my hand knows the touch and twining of them all.
Make no mistake, do not be deluded,
Over the great city
There I am.[7]

[7] Edward Carpenter, in *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*, p. 363.

Chapter II

IS THE SENSE OF GOD'S PRESENCE A DELUSION?

I

In the preceding chapter we described the method we propose to follow in attempting to find the truth about God. We shall not make the familiar appeal to ancient authorities. Rather we shall take the evident facts of life and experience, study them closely, and then see what conclusions about God can reasonably be drawn from them. In our first chapter we studied some of the significant facts of the world without, the realm of Nature. We came to the conclusion that they implied that a Creative Intelligence is working at the heart of things. This reality we call God. We now turn to the other realm of human experience, the world within. When we study the thoughts, feelings, and inner life of normal individuals

what do we find? Do the facts disclosed there imply a God?

However we explain the situation most people have—sometime in life—a vivid sense of God's nearness. In many instances this feeling comes in a quiet, undramatic way. Slowly and for no apparent reason the cares and problems of the everyday world begin to fade, and men seem to become conscious of a Friendly Someone close beside them. Take this testimony, quoted in a recent discussion of the more normal types of mysticism:

> At times God is very real to me. He seems more real, more near, than any human being. Sometimes this sense of His presence comes when I am in the midst of great sorrow and anxiety. At other times there seems no special reason for the coming of the feeling. For example when I have been alone outdoors, or when I have been reading something that has touched me deeply by its beauty or its truth, then I often have the quick, glad sense that God is near. These experiences

> are not accompanied by any emotional excitement. Rather they bring a feeling of deep peace and gladness. I have never spoken of them to anyone, but they are my strongest ground for belief in God.[1]

Those words might have been written by scores of the people we meet in everyday life. They give a clear picture of the experience of God which has come to great numbers of men and women to-day.

In other instances the sense of God's presence is definitely connected with some critical moment in life. There were no spectacular accompaniments of the experience such as voices or visions or ecstatic emotions, but the feeling of God's nearness and reality was suddenly and singularly vivid. We do not have to rely on the records of rescue missions or eighteenth-century revivals for accounts of such experiences. Many of the people we know best might tell us of them did they choose to reveal their inmost secrets. The following incident is typical:

[1] Quoted by J. B. Pratt in *The Religious Consciousness.*

On that particular Sunday morning I finally went to church out of deference to the desires of my friends. Dr. A. J. Gordon of Boston was the preacher, but nothing that he said touched me at all. After the service was over I found I was supposed to remain and attend a Sunday School class which Mrs. Gordon was teaching. I can remember distinctly that I did not pay much attention to what she said. At the end of the session she detained me and began to inquire about my religious doubts. Then she knelt beside me and began to pray. I thought the whole performance something of a bore, but I remained through it because I did not want to seem discourteous. In the middle of her prayer something strange happened. There suddenly came to me an overwhelming sense of a Presence, a Presence infinitely true and pure and tender. It broke through all my preconceived notions and revealed itself to me in such power and beauty that even to-day—

twenty-five years later—that experience stands out as the most real and vivid thing in my whole life." [2]

Here are facts of the inner world which are as real as those facts of the outer world which we discussed in our first chapter. Do they imply a God, or are they merely the delusions of an overstimulated imagination?

II

In our time three main attacks are made on the validity of such experiences. To begin with, critics point out the indubitable fact that many of the individuals who claim to "meet God" prove on careful examination to be abnormal. Some of them are obviously unbalanced, the unfortunate victims of religious delusions. Others, ordinarily normal, are the temporary victims of excitement or psychic disturbance. Consider the experiences of the Spanish nun, Saint Teresa. On one occasion she wrote:

As I was at prayer on the day of Saint

[2] Quoted by J. B. Pratt in *The Religious Consciousness.*

> Peter, I saw or rather felt the Christ beside me. I knew it was He, and He seemed to be walking at my right side. As this was not a vision of the imagination I could not understand in what form He was present. But there He was at my right side. I felt Him very clearly.

Such a statement is impressive if Saint Teresa's testimony is trustworthy. But what about her mental and physical health? Was she in any condition to have normal experiences and then report them in reliable fashion? In one of her journals she gives this unhappy account of her own situation:

> To dispose me toward my profession the Lord sent me a great illness. I had weakness as well as fever. The new manner of life in the convent and the change in my food increased my ill health, and my heart trouble became extreme. Thus I passed my first year in the convent. Much of the time I was only partly conscious, and sometimes I lost consciousness altogether. In the month of August I

> was taken with a fainting-fit which lasted four days. The Sisters were so sure I was dead that when I did regain consciousness I found on my eyelids the wax of the candle they had used to see if I were still living.[a]

The conclusions modern critics draw from such testimony are familiar to us all. They say, "Why bother with these stories of mystical experience? The so-called great mystics were neurotics, nothing more. Their sense of Christ's presence or God's nearness was a delusion created by an unstable mentality. In all likelihood the less dramatic experiences of religious believers to-day are equally illusory. They may well be the product of a mental mechanism temporarily put out of order by religious excitement." Obviously we must find an answer to such objections if we are to maintain that the more normal types of mystical experience imply a real God who has dealings with us.

The answer to these objections is not so

[a] Quoted by J. B. Pratt in *The Religious Consciousness.*

hard to discover as we might first imagine. Granted that many of the "great mystics" were abnormal individuals, and that their experience contained at least some elements of delusion or illusion. The experience of normal people has, of course, little or nothing to do with the experience of abnormal people. Because neurotics have had a false sense of God we must not jump to the conclusion that more stable individuals cannot have a true sense of Him. Perhaps an illustration drawn from another realm of experience will make this point clear. Here are a dozen people in a flower garden in mid-summer admiring the beauty all about them. One of the men happens to have an abnormal color sense and presently begins to report startling experiences. He says that the roses and the grass are alike in color, and that if this color is green the roses must certainly be green. On the other hand if the color is red, the grass is obviously red. Then he adds that the sunflowers and the clear sky are the same in hue, and that if this color is blue the sunflowers are certainly blue. Simi-

larly if the color is yellow, the sky is distinctly yellow. Here, we all agree, is an abnormal individual undergoing an abnormal experience. But do his mistakes demonstrate that there are no color variations in the flowers, and that the people who insist they see beauty there are deluded? We willingly admit that many spectacular "visions of God" and "experiences of Christ" belong in the category of illusions. But we insist that the experiences of normal people be kept separate from the experiences of abnormal people. Certainly the mistakes of the latter should not be used to discredit the wholly different conclusions of the former.

A second objection to the validity of mystical experiences is this. Many modern critics remind us that human beings are essentially gregarious in their instincts, that they are forever seeking companionship, and that they become desperately unhappy when left alone. "Turn where you will," these critics say, "you find men huddling together in the ineradicable desire to find comrades. When human beings vanish they turn pitifully to the animals, and

gain at least some victory over the sense of loneliness by trying to communicate with a horse or a dog or even a bird. Solitary confinement is the worst torture that can be devised for the gregarious human spirit. What if our incessant search for God represents this deep-seated impulse to find a companion? What if we are driven to imagine a God, create an illusory sense of His presence, in order to relieve the otherwise intolerable loneliness of our existence?"

This argument has been stated with unusual vividness by one of our ablest modern essayists. He writes:

> As I see philosophy after philosophy falling into this unproved belief in the Friend behind phenomena, and as I find that I myself cannot (except for a moment and then by an effort) refrain from making the same assumption, it seems to me that perhaps we are here under the spell of an old and ineradicable instinct. We are gregarious animals, and our ancestors have been such for countless ages.

We cannot help looking at the world in the way in which gregarious animals do. We see it in terms of humanity and fellowship. Students of animals under domestication have shown us how the habits of a gregarious animal, taken from its kind, are shaped in a thousand details by reference to the pack which is no longer there. The pack to which a dog tries to smell his way back, and to which he calls for help when danger threatens. It is a strange and touching thing, this eternal hunger of the gregarious animal for its herd of friends. And it may very possibly be in this matter of the Friend behind phenomena that our own yearning and our almost ineradicable and instinctive conviction (since they are certainly not founded on either reason or observation) are in origin the groping of a lonely-souled gregarious animal to find its herd or its herd-leader in the great spaces between the stars." [4]

[4] Gilbert Murray.

Is that the origin of our sense of God's nearness? Is the mystical experience merely a mental defense mechanism, helpful but essentially misleading?

The weakness in this argument will occur to anyone who thinks carefully. This argument assumes that the impulse to find God leads us away from reality. Must we make that assumption? What if the impulse to find God leads us toward reality? As a matter of fact our other instincts push us in the direction of things that are indubitably real. Our physical impulses drive us to seek certain satisfactions, and the satisfactions prove to be there—actual realities rather than creations of the mind. Within our hearts there is an impulse to find beauty—beauty of nature, art, music, human life. In response to this insistent demand we go out to seek beauty, and we discover our universe is filled with it. This essential loveliness is not something we read into the world in order to satisfy our own craving. It was here before any human spirit reached out for it.

Within our mind there is an eagerness to find order, regularity, law, in the apparently arbitrary and unpredictable sequences of Nature. Centuries of study have revealed the fact that there is something in the universe—something indubitably real—which corresponds to the desire for order within us. The quest of the human mind is met by regularities in Nature which may be infinitely complicated and far beyond our comprehension but which are demonstrably not illusions.

Is it likely, now, that our insistent search for a Comrade in the adventure of life meets nothing but emptiness? Is it reasonable to assume that when all our other impulses find a real satisfaction this deepest impulse of all must concoct an imaginary answer to its desire? "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee." Some of us are convinced that Saint Augustine found a great truth. We believe that this instinctive longing for God is not a cruel mockery, pushing us across a desert of

aspiration toward a tantalizing mirage. We believe it is God's way of calling us to Himself. It is the summons of the Eternal Father to His lonely human children.

The third objection raised against the normal types of mystical experience is the most interesting and impressive of all. Many modern critics are saying: "The human mind is obviously prone to error. As a matter of fact, it plays numberless tricks on the unwary. One of its most familiar deceits is to generate the feeling that someone is hiding behind our chair or lurking around the corner. What one of us has not been plagued by this false sense of presence? We finally look behind the chair, and then peer around the corner. No one there, of course; and yet we could have taken our oath that someone else was really in the room. What if our sense of God's presence is merely this same trick of the mind, applied in this case to a divine rather than a human intruder?"

One of the leading psychologists of our time has recently developed this argument with un-

usual skill.[5] In a widely read article he tells how he has succeeded in generating a wholly illusory "sense of presence" in the minds of the people in his laboratory. He writes:

> The subject of my experiment sits in a chair in a dimly lighted room, with his back to my assistants who wait motionless some twenty-five feet away. He is then blindfolded and told that at any moment one of the assistants is likely to step forward and stand just behind the chair. When this happens he is to raise his hand. One of the subjects of the experiment gives this account of his subsequent sensations: "After I had been sitting in the chair for a minute or two I began to have the distinct feeling that someone was near me. I had no visual image of the person, but I was sure it was a person, and that he was standing about four feet behind my chair and a little to the left. I

[5] James H. Leuba, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, in "The Sense of Presence."

had a somewhat uncanny feeling, and then an intense desire to stand and face the individual I was convinced was waiting there."

But was there anyone there? The account of the experiment concludes with these devastating words: "As a matter of fact there was no one in the room, nor had there been anyone there for several minutes." The assistants had been instructed (as in the parlor game of our childhood) to slip out quietly as soon as the subject was blindfolded. What if our sense of God's presence is a similar trick of the imagination?

But here again the answer to the argument soon reveals itself. The sense of God's reality and nearness which we are trying to defend is entirely different from the sense of a localized human presence which this experiment describes. When anyone to-day reports that he has "sensed God" four feet behind him and a little to the left, we smile. We feel that such a person is as thoroughly deluded as Saint Teresa was when she reported that she "felt Christ" walking at her right side. The normal

person's experience of God has no such localized element in it. It is rather the conviction that a Mind, a Love, a Power-for-Good permeates our universe, and that in this all-encompassing Reality we human creatures "live and move and have our being." Sometimes this sense of the divine presence develops gradually as we grow older, connecting itself with moods and experiences which vary with different individuals. In other cases—and the one quoted at the beginning of this chapter is a clear example—this sense of God's reality and nearness wakens within the mind as the immediate result of a spiritual crisis. But in either case the sense of God is something totally different from that familiar and uncanny feeling that another human being is standing unobserved in the vicinity. Perhaps the closest parallel to our sense of God's presence is the feeling that wakens within us when we realize that the love of the person we desire most is ours, and that it will be ours no matter where we are. There are no semi-material manifestations of this human love, and no one of us thinks of it in localized terms. We can only say we sense

its reality and feel that it surrounds us wherever we go.

Such a starved bank of moss
Till that May morn,
Blue ran the flash across,
Violets were born.

Sky—what a scowl of cloud
Till near and far
Ray on ray split the shroud,
Splendid! A star!

World—how it walled about
Life with disgrace
Till God's own smile came out,
That was thy face![6]

This experience of human love obviously brought no sense of a localized human presence following the lover everywhere. Our experience of the divine Love is similar. It brings no feeling that God stands in semi-material form at our elbow. Rather it wakens within us the consciousness that God is with us wherever we may be. "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? Though I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even

[6] Robert Browning.

there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand hold me."

III

If we thus reject the idea that these mystical experiences of the less extreme type are delusions, what interpretation do we put upon them? Our belief can be stated simply. We begin our quest for God by studying the world outside. The situations we discover there convince us that a Creative Intelligence is at work at the heart of things. This Vast Mind is as real—as "objective"—as any of the material things that make their instant appeal to our five senses. But this God is not bound within any particular region of our earth, or localized in any one corner of the sky. Rather God fills and permeates our entire universe, surrounds us as the all-encompassing sea surrounds the innumerable forms of marine life suspended within its depths, or as the clinging air surrounds a million different birds in flight. To us all there come moments in which our power to sense God and respond to the impulses which He sends suddenly increases. There is nothing strange or essentially incred-

ible about such a situation. Our ability to recognize and respond to beauty fluctuates from day to day and even from hour to hour. Our ability to appreciate human friendship and sense human affection is equally variable. Why should we be surprised to find that our consciousness of the divine Presence shifts with changing moods and fluctuating external conditions? Why should we be surprised to discover that there are a few people to whom this "vision of the unseen and eternal" comes rarely or not at all? But to practically all normal individuals there do come moments—frequent or infrequent—when the clouds lift and the light breaks through. Then these men and women "find God," and realize as Paul realized centuries ago that "neither life nor death, things present nor things to come" can separate them from His all-surrounding love.

Still, still with Thee when purple morning breaketh,
When the bird waketh and the shadows flee;
Fairer than morning, lovelier than the daylight,
Dawns the sweet consciousness I am with Thee.

When this experience comes to a man the

very quality of his existence changes. The sense of loneliness, uncertainty, and vague fear is swept away, and in its place wakens a feeling which a mystic of long ago called "the peace of God which passeth understanding." Perhaps we can best describe this change by quoting the experience of two men, one of whom never found God. A century ago Jean Paul Richter, the German skeptic, gave this vivid description of his own view of life and his own inner feeling:

> There is no God. I have traversed the worlds, I have risen to the suns, I have passed athwart the great waste places of the sky. There is no God. I have descended to the place where the very shadow cast by Being dies out and ends. I have gazed into the gulf beyond and cried "Where art thou, Father?" But no answer came, save the sound of the storm which rages uncontrolled. We are orphans, you and I. Every soul in this great corpse-trench of the universe is utterly alone.

Beside that view of life, with its grim sense of loneliness and inescapable defeat, put the view of life and the inner attitude reflected in these lines by Walter Rauschenbusch:

In the castle of my soul there is a little postern gate
Where when I enter I am in the presence of God.
In a moment, in the turning of a thought,
I am where God is.
When I meet God there all life gains a new meaning—
Small things become great, and great things small,
Lowly and despised things are shot through with glory,
My troubles seem but the pebbles on the road,
My joys seem like the everlasting hills,
All my fever is gone in the great peace of God,
And I pass through the door from Time into Eternity.

Chapter III

CAN WE DISCOVER ANYTHING ABOUT GOD?

I

The preceding chapters have stated our reasons for believing that there is a God. As we study the facts of the world outside—the realm of Nature—we feel they imply that a Creative Intelligence is working at the heart of things. As we study the facts of the world within—the realm of thought, feeling, and inner experience—we feel these facts too point toward some Reality beyond ourselves. In this chapter we shall carry the argument a step further. Granted that there is a God, do we know anything about Him? Can we discover what He is like and what He is trying to do, or must He always remain a "veiled Being"?

The Christians of the past felt it was a simple matter to discover the truth about God's nature and God's purposes. They had (so they believed) merely to study the Bible, collect its statements about God, and then arrange them in logical sequence. There stood an authentic revelation of the divine nature. Some of the conclusions thus reached by the theologians of the past have seemed to the thinkers of succeeding centuries indubitably true. Others, curiously enough, have finally come to appear ludicrous. It was believed by many Bible students of the past, for example, that God's native language was Hebrew. He had, so the orthodox idea ran, invented the language and passed it on to Adam. Dr. Whitaker, professor of divinity at Cambridge in 1588, made this solemn pronouncement: "The Hebrew language alone prevailed in the world before the erection of the Tower of Babel. It was this tongue which Adam used, as is evident from the Scriptures. God Himself showed the model and method of writing it when He delivered the law, written in His own hand on

tablets of stone, to Moses." Dr. John Lightfoot, speaking a generation later, was even more explicit: "Other commendations the Hebrew language needeth not. For antiquity it is the tongue of Adam. For sanctity it is the tongue of God. Adam was the first speaker of it, and God the first founder."

Sometimes the beliefs about God thus deduced from passages in the Bible proved highly disastrous. Jonathan Edwards, preaching in New England only two hundred years ago, made this gruesome statement: "As innocent as little children seem to us, they are not so in God's sight if they are out of Christ. To Him they are young vipers, and infinitely more hateful than any serpent." Why these cruel notions about God's hatred of some children? Edwards could point grimly to the words of the Bible: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me." "We were by nature the children of wrath." "As in Adam all die." "Ye must be born again." Grant Edwards' premises, and it is hard to dodge his conclusions.

But the theologians of the past did not limit themselves to the explicit statements of the Bible as they sought to discover the secrets of the divine nature. They soon learned to expound and expand verses of Scripture by involved methods of dialectic and interpretation, and thus they built up that impressive structure of speculative doctrine which arose during the Middle Ages. Someone once asked Anselm, the leading theologian of the eleventh century, why it was the second Person of the Trinity rather than either the first or the third who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Anselm's answer, published in one of the most famous theological treatises of the medieval era, suggests the method of discovering truth about God which was in vogue at the time:

> If one of the other Persons in the Trinity (either God the Father or God the Holy Spirit) had become incarnate, there would have been two Sons in the Trinity —the Son before the Incarnation, and the Son by the Incarnation. Likewise if God

> the Father (rather than God the Son) had become incarnate, there would have been two grandsons in the Trinity. For God the Father by assuming humanity would have become the grandson of the parents of the Virgin Mary, and God the Son (though having nothing to do with man) would be the grandson of the Virgin Mary herself, for He would have been the son of Her Son—God the Father.

Since these complications were essentially incredible, it had to be God the Son rather than either of the other members of the Trinity who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.

It is clear to anyone who knows the temper of the modern age that these ideas about God have now largely passed away. It is only by an effort of the imagination that we can believe they once dominated the keenest minds of Christendom. More important still, the method by which these ideas were evolved has also passed away. Modern Bible study and modern science have made it impossible for the

thoughtful people of our time to reach conclusions about God in the way in which our ancestors were reaching them a few centuries ago. As the old beliefs and the old method of reaching the beliefs have thus crumbled, our generation has entered a period of profound religious perplexity. Most intelligent people to-day are inclined to believe there is a God, but they have frankly little idea what He is like and still less idea how they can find out. Again and again we find evidences of this widespread uncertainty. An anonymous writer confesses in one of our magazines: "I wish I had the firm faith of my parents. They were as certain of God as they were of the things that happened yesterday. But their faith has been made impossible for me by the science and the philosophy of my generation, and by the pain and suffering I find on every side. Yet I keep going to church, trying to believe what is taught there, and attempting to lead a Christian life." Even more vivid is the picture of contemporary agnosticism which William Watson gives in one of his short poems:

I wandered far in the wold
And after the heat and the glare
I came at eve to a churchyard old,
The yew trees seemed in prayer.
And around me was dust in dust
And the fleeting light and repose,
And the infinite pathos of human trust
In a God whom no man knows.

II

In such a situation anyone who attempts to advance new ideas about God and suggest new methods of finding the truth about Him would do well to make two frank confessions at the start. The first is that our understanding of the universe and the life-process is pitifully incomplete. At every turn we run upon situations which we cannot understand or explain, much less fit into a consistent philosophy. Consider, for example, the developments which are going on (or threatening to go on) within the realm of Nature and which are—as far as we can see—directly hostile to all human values. We are frankly baffled when we attempt to connect these developments with the purposes of a loving God, or even fit them into a rational

scheme of things. "Geologists now tell us that an average decrease of only eight or ten degrees in the annual temperature of the northern part of our globe would suffice to bring back the glacial era. Little by little the ice-cap in the polar regions would accumulate. Little by little the snows would deepen and the great glaciers on the mountains would assemble once more. Less and less would the warmth of summer be sufficient to melt the ever-deepening ice and snow. Thus by scarcely perceptible yet sure degrees the advance of the glaciers would begin, and in the course of time all the regions which are now fertile and inhabited would be locked once more in the frozen embrace of cold and death." [1] The strange thing is that this disaster has happened not once but many times in the past. The very region in which many of us now live was once buried beneath hundreds of feet of glittering ice. What if history should repeat itself? We may as well confess frankly that situations and possi-

[1] W. R. Bowie, *Some Open Ways to God*, pp. 206-7.

bilities like these are a riddle to the wisest of us. Everything we say about God and life must be prefaced by a frank confession that our knowledge is sadly limited. Carlyle once described our situation in a parable of extraordinary vividness:

> To the minnow every cranny and pebble of its little native creek may have become familiar. But does the minnow understand the ocean tides and the periodic currents, the trade-winds and monsoons and lunar eclipses? By all these conditions his little creek is regulated, and may from time to time (unmiraculously enough) be quite overset and reversed. Such a minnow is man, his creek the planet Earth, his ocean the Immeasurable All, and his monsoons and periodic currents the mysterious course of Providence through æons of æons.

The second confession we must make follows naturally from the first. There are numberless questions about God Himself which we

cannot answer, and which (for all we can tell) we may never be able to answer. If the universe and the life-process are puzzling, the Ultimate Source from which they came is even more puzzling. The time when men felt they could explain everything about God and justify each of His purposes ended long ago. We now realize that our knowledge of Him is sadly limited, and that we—like explorers caught in a forest at nightfall—soon come to the end of our few trails and then stand baffled and helpless before the dark mystery beyond. To begin with, no one can explain why God made our universe at all. We can suggest possible explanations, but they are only guesses. Neither can we explain why God, having decided to create our universe, created it on the pattern He did. Repeatedly college students, catching the full implication of the evolutionary theory, ask their teachers, "Why did God not make things perfect from the beginning, instead of forcing them to struggle toward perfection through such long periods

of time and at such terrific cost in suffering and waste?" No one can answer that question. We may hazard guesses as to God's reasons, but they are guesses and no more.

When we turn to questions about God Himself and His own nature we are even more thoroughly baffled. How are we to picture God, or must human minds abandon such an attempt entirely? Does God know everything in advance? Can He do literally anything, or is He bound by laws—the laws of logic and mathematics, for example—as we are? Was there ever a time when God did not exist? Did He create the universe out of nothing, or was there something already here for Him to work with? If there was something here to work with, where did it come from? If He made the universe out of nothing, how can we conceive such a process? No one can answer these riddles, or scores of other riddles like them. When we have said all we can about God, we must make the unhappy confession Paul made centuries ago: "Now we know *in part*."

Thou so far we grope to grasp Thee,
Thou so near we cannot clasp Thee,
All-preserving spirit flowing
Through the worlds yet past our knowing,
Still creating, still inspiring,
Never of Thy creatures tiring,
Though all human races claim Thee
Thought and language fail to name Thee,
Mortal lips be dumb before Thee,
Silence only may adore Thee![2]

III

Granted there are these limits to our knowledge of God, can we learn anything about Him? Even if we cannot discover all the truth, can we find a few fragments of it? Some of us are convinced we can. Furthermore we are sure that the few beliefs we can establish with reasonable certainty are enough to form the basis for a satisfying and an effective religious faith. Perhaps an illustration will make clear the method we propose to follow and the general type of conclusion we reach.

There is a shipwrecked sailor, washed by the waves toward a tiny island in the Pacific.

[2] C. P. Cranch.

As he crawls up out of the breakers he sees a cabin on the hilltop just behind the beach. With an enormous sense of relief he hurries toward the building and knocks at the door. Hearing no answer he pushes his way in. What a strange sight! On the walls before him are a score of pictures—some in oils, some in water-colors, some in pastels. On the table in the center of the room are a dozen tubes of paint, a box of crayons, and a palette with colors still soft. The occupant of the cabin is nowhere to be seen, but the sailor draws several immediate conclusions about him. He must be an artist, and the condition of the pictures and the paints suggests that he is still on the premises and still at work. Then the sailor begins to examine the pictures more closely. Presently he realizes that each one is a marine. One shows a still lagoon, with palm trees overarching the clear blue water. Another shows a mile of white breakers curling along a yellow beach. Still another shows a storm at sea, with wave and sky a mass of driven gray. What can the sailor conclude about the artist's inter-

ests and experiences? He can conclude that the artist loves the sea, and that he has studied it in many places and under many different conditions. Suppose, now, that the sailor himself understands the history of art and the technique of painting. Suppose he studies those pictures minutely in the hope that from their composition and general type he can learn still more about the absent artist. He will be able to establish a long list of probabilities. He will be able to figure out where the artist came from, under whom he studied, and about how long he has been at work in this particular spot. Granted that some of these deductions might be mistaken in detail, and that others might be wholly false. In the main, the procedure of arguing back from the artist's work to the nature and the experience of the artist himself would be sound.

Now apply this parable to the problem of discovering the truth about the unseen God. Humanity finds itself marooned on a tiny island called Earth, surrounded by seas of space. Experience leads us to believe that

Someone Else is here, though this other inhabitant is not evident to our senses. We study the situations that confront us, situations for which this Other Self is presumably responsible. What conclusions can we draw about Him?

IV

One fact seems clear. God must love beauty, love it as we do. The more we examine our universe, the further telescopes and microscopes carry our eager vision, the more obvious this element of loveliness appears. The vast life-process, creating snowflakes and solar systems, turns out products that have within them an indubitable quality of splendor. This element of beauty is not something which our minds read into the universe. It was here before human minds began to operate at all. The majesty of sunrise, the superb lacework of a snowflake, the gorgeous play of color on the scales of a fish—surely such essential and inherent beauties tell us something about the Great Reality from which such a universe came.

All vision fades, but splendor does not fail;
Though joy perish and all her company
And there be nothing left of it to see,
Splendor is in the grain. This lovely vale
Of rock and tree and pool and sky may pale
And fade some autumn with its greenery,
And its form totter, crumble utterly
And scatter with some universal gale.
Yet be they spread ever so wide and free
The gale will cause the dream to come again,
The world-formations out of mists will rise,
And there will be thoughts of eternity,
And hopes the heart of man will know are vain,
And tears will come as now into the eyes.[8]

A second thing we know about God is this. God understands the difference between right and wrong, and works for the victory of the right. Why do we reach that conclusion? Look at the long course of history. As the slow centuries pass, as one civilization gives place to another, the things our human minds call right slowly gain the victory. In the long run falsehood betrays itself, injustice reaps a grim harvest of retribution, and selfishness draws on itself a slow but inevitable sentence

[8] Samuel Roth.

of death. These are no hasty conclusions drawn by religious enthusiasts to bolster up a tottering faith. These are the sober judgments about life and history formed by millions of observant people. James Anthony Froude, the eminent historian of the last century, spoke for this great company: "This world is somehow built on moral foundations—that is the lesson of history. In the long run it is well with the good and ill with the wicked. This is the only teaching which history repeats with any distinctness." What can we conclude about the Author of a life-process which reveals characteristics like these? Surely He must see the difference between right and wrong, and be concerned with the triumph of right.

Or look at the curious sense of moral obligation which we find in every normal human being. We give it various names—conscience, idealism, loyalty to the best, an instinctive appreciation of fairness, an ineradicable streak of decency. But however we describe the thing there it is, as much a part of the normal man's

equipment as his power to see or his ability to hear. In recent years many people have tried to discredit this power by showing that at different times and under different circumstances it impels men in different directions. The "dictates of conscience" in the Middle Ages were, these critics very truly point out, different from those of to-day. But such statements overlook the significant element in the situation. It is inevitable that definitions of right and wrong should change from age to age. It is inevitable that the precise course of action toward which conscience impels us should shift, and shift perceptibly, in the course of time. But that shift in direction is not the significant fact. The significant fact is that there is something within every normal individual which pushes him insistently in the direction of what is right rather than what is wrong—whatever the right (determined by the ideas and standards of the day) may seem to be. This impulse toward the best, like the quality of intelligence, seems to emerge whenever the life-process reaches a given level of develop-

ment. All of us have known animals that exhibited, in occasional and rudimentary forms, this curious sense of right and wrong. In the case of little children the power to make moral distinctions emerges at a surprisingly early age. In the normal adult it is one of the most powerful forces operating within the personality. Tagore has described in singularly vivid phrases what conscience does in human lives to-day.

I came out alone on my way to the tryst,
But who is this that follows me in the silent dark?
I move aside to avoid his presence
But I escape him not.
He makes the dust rise from the earth with his swagger,
He adds his loud voice to every word that I utter.
He is my own little self, my lord.
He knows no shame,
But I am ashamed to come to thy door in his company.

Granted that this sense of right and wrong emerges naturally and operates unmiraculously in human lives. What conclusions can we draw about the God who is responsible for a life-process eventuating in such a quality? Surely He must feel as we do about treachery

and injustice, falsehood and cruelty. Surely He too must be on the side of right.

There is one more thing we know about God. We know that He is dominated by love and kindness, just as the noblest of His creatures are. Many people feel that they must have recourse to some supernatural revelation to establish this fact about God. But if they studied the facts of the natural world what would they find? They would find that love and kindness are wrought into the very structure of things, and emerge with greater and greater clearness as we rise higher in the scale of living creatures. To say that Nature is "red in tooth and claw" is to describe only part —and apparently the less significant part—of the scene. One of the greatest biologists of our time writes these words under the heading, "Mothering among animals":

> The squirrel makes a big nest of moss and twigs on the branches of a tree. The harvest mouse weaves strips of leaves into a nest fastened to the shocks of wheat. The dormouse builds a nest with moss and

> fibres in a low bush in the thicket. It always means mothering. Or think of the birds. There is the weaver-bird's nest dangling from the tip of a branch overhanging a stream. There is the two-roomed clay nest of the South American oven-bird. There is the beautiful feather-nest of the eider duck made with down from the bird's own body. There is the nest of the long-tailed tit made of over two thousand feathers which the bird has gathered one by one. What industry, what skill, what patience—and not for self![4]

Come higher in the scale of life and what do you find? This impulse toward love and kindness flowers into the sacrificial devotion which is the noblest quality our human race knows. The love of a mother for her children, the love of a patriot offering his all for his country, the love of Jesus gazing out on a hostile world and then saying quietly, "For their sake I consecrate myself"—surely such realities tell us

[4] J. A. Thompson, *Science, Old and New*, p. 191.

something about the God from whom such a world and such human creatures came. Some of us can never believe that these qualities emerged by chance in a universe which is essentially cruel, or that they sprang from an Ultimate Author who himself knows nothing of love and devotion. We would as soon believe that orchids could grow out of a glacier, or that lilies could flourish amid the waves of a salt sea. Back of the sacrificial kindness emerging everywhere about us is a quality of love in God Himself. "God is love. Everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." Centuries ago other seekers after truth reached this same conviction.

To Christians an argument like this has a special conclusion. Among the millions of personalities that have appeared on our Earth we find one supreme figure. A man who sensed the difference between right and wrong as no one else has sensed it before or since. A man whose life was dominated to a unique degree by the love that never faileth. A man whose influence has quickened in unparalleled

measure our eagerness to do right and our willingness to live the life of sacrificial devotion. If we catch glimpses of God when we see these qualities in ordinary degree in other men, we must catch an unrivaled vision of God when we study Jesus Christ. Granted that human lives can be only miniatures of the divine. We believe that the miniature we find in Jesus is the truest and clearest humanity has. Magnify to infinity Jesus' love of right and Jesus' eagerness to help others, and you see two of the qualities of God Himself. "We have seen the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ." That, through all the centuries, has been the faith of Christians.

Chapter IV

CAN WE RECONCILE GOD'S LOVE AND THE WORLD'S PAIN?

I

We might begin our discussion of this topic by quoting a paragraph from one of the current novels.[1] The hero of this story is a British officer who returns from the War to encounter a series of staggering reverses. For months he can find no work, then his wife deserts him, and finally he is driven to accept employment of a distinctly menial type. He clings to this humiliating position, and after almost incredible self-sacrifice succeeds in sending his son through the university and medical school. The boy establishes himself as a surgeon, and the father anticipates at least a few years of happiness at the end of his checkered career. But he is suddenly stricken

[1] *Sorrell and Son* by Warren Deeping.

with cancer and finds himself facing the prospect of ever-deepening torture terminated by inescapable death. Here are the bitter sentences in which he finally phrases his philosophy of life: "I don't believe in anything. The whole business is beyond me. Sometimes I have had the feeling that there is a plan to it all, but then again I have discovered so many things that are against that idea. We human creatures are fighting a lone battle against a vast indifference. Life just treads on you, or it doesn't. I don't care much now that life has put its foot on me. I kept my pigmy back stiff for a time. I managed to buzz a bit before I was pulped on the window-pane." The world is full of situations quite as tragic as this. How do we explain them? Do they not disprove everything we have been saying about God and His love?

The suffering of individuals is only the beginning of our problem. When we turn to the race as a whole we find that it too has a precarious hold on life and on happiness. At any moment vast and resistless developments may

begin within the realm of Nature which will cripple or even annihilate us all. Consider the newly discovered facts about the heat and the cold by which we are surrounded. Our atmosphere extends only a few miles above the surface of the Earth, and beyond that an almost unimaginable cold fills stellar space. Meteorologists tell us that the temperature in the sky soon drops to 70 degrees below zero, and that beyond our atmosphere it drops to 459 degrees below zero. Meantime, a few miles below our feet, rages the terrific heat of the interior of the Earth. "It is a wholesome thing for proud humanity to look upward on a bright day and consider the fleecy clouds overhead. They are composed of spicules of ice, they float in an arctic cold, and they serve to remind us what creatures of a hot-house we are. If our roof of air should be removed we should all be frozen to death in a moment. Just above that thin roof is deadly cold, and just below the thin crust of the Earth is equally deadly heat. Only within the narrow shell that separates these two regions can the human race

strut about and congratulate itself on its great powers." [2]

Anyone who appreciates the implications of such facts will readily understand why scientists are now saying that humanity may not have a permanent existence on the Earth after all. There are many ways in which our precarious hold on life might quickly and easily be loosened. Suppose the fatal cold just above our heads should break through that thin and invisible roof of air. Suppose the deadly heat just beneath our feet should leap forth upon us in a series of gigantic eruptions. Or suppose the radiation of light and heat from the sun should sink below the level necessary to maintain organic life, as it almost certainly will do sooner or later. Our whole race would be blotted out as cruelly and relentlessly as that British officer was. One of our modern essayists, discussing the ways in which human life on the Earth might come to an end, writes: "One is tempted to imagine a race of supermen some millions of years hence grimly con-

[2] Henshaw Ward, *Exploring the Universe*, p. 54.

fronting the issue of extinction as the sun flickers out. Probably science will have solved long before that time the problem of the source of the sun's heat, and will be able to state precisely when the solar radiation will sink to a level fatal to animal and human life. Then will begin the greatest of all struggles, as man makes his last, hopeless stand against the brute forces of the natural world and tries to fight off the hovering demons of darkness and cold." [3] But what will be the end of that struggle? There can be only one end—a frozen, untenanted Earth. When tragedies like these stalk us all, how can we keep our faith in a God of love? Are we not driven to conclude that the heartless powers of Nature are in ultimate control?

II

Many people of our time, suddenly confronted with problems like these, take refuge in the conventional theories and explanations that were developed before the magnitude of

[3] Joseph McCabe.

the world's pain was realized. Some individuals tell us, for example, that these elements of tragedy must be present in the universe if we are to appreciate by contrast the happier phases of experience. It is the blackness of the shadow that brings out the radiance of the sunshine, the harshness of an occasional discord that accentuates and reveals the true splendor of succeeding harmonies. This somewhat naïve but widely accepted theory has found expression in scores of proverbs, epigrams, and popular poems. The following stanzas are often quoted:

If all the skies were sunshine
  Our faces would be fain
To feel once more upon them
  The cooling splash of rain.
If all the world were music
  Our hearts would often long
For one sweet strain of silence
  To break the endless song.
If life were always merry
  Our souls would seek relief
And rest from weary laughter
  In the quiet arms of grief.[4]

[4] Henry Van Dyke.

But anyone who has had experience with the major disasters of life soon rejects with impatience this rather theoretical justification of suffering. No one of us would dare tell that British officer who was dying of cancer that his ghastly pain had been sent to make him recognize and appreciate the glory of health and vigor. He would instantly reply, "But did I need such an awful thing as cancer to teach me that lesson? And what good will the instruction do if the cancer kills me?" The plain fact is that the amount of suffering in the universe breaks this theory down completely. If there were only a few minor pains in our world we might well believe that they were put here as a foil to joy and beauty. But the centuries overflow with suffering, and more than once the vast discords and raucous dissonances of the great symphony of life threaten to obliterate the intervening measures of harmony.

Another popular explanation of suffering says that it represents God's deliberate effort to discipline and strengthen us. Here again the theory finds expression in familiar sayings.

All of us have heard well-meaning sympathizers repeat the words: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," "The heart must bleed before it feels," "We learn courage only in battle and patience only in defeat." But anyone who studies human experience carefully will soon see the weakness in this theory. The amount of suffering on our world seems wholly incommensurate with the gains secured. If God's purpose is to discipline us, the necessary training could certainly come without so much and such constant pain.

Some months ago an elderly man submitted to Dr. Cadman this heartbroken question: "I am seventy-four years of age, and I find myself utterly unable to explain the following situations. In 1895 my wife, sick with melancholia, took her own life. In 1901 my eldest son died of a fever. In 1920 my eldest daughter shot herself during a fit of mental depression. In 1924 my only living son and his two small children were burned to death in their own home. My question about life can be summed up in a single word: Why?" It is

hard to justify such reiterated agonies on the theory that suffering is deliberately sent to bring discipline. This man may have needed some pain to bring out his finer qualities, but hardly so much pain. A human personality, subjected to such repeated and such searching strains, is likely to be weakened rather than strengthened by the experience. The question with which that pitiful letter concluded is hardly to be answered by a pious reference to "God's chastenings." At the end of his long career as a minister Dr. Jowett confessed: "In the early days of my ministry I used to tell people who were in trouble that there was a reason for their suffering and that through it God was seeking to discipline and develop them. But as I grew older I became less confident. Now I simply say I do not understand." Many thoughtful people have passed through the same transition. Sooner or later the riddle of suffering baffles us all.

In recent years a third explanation of the suffering in the world has been advanced by

many people. It asserts that God is not fully in control of things, and that the tragedies of life represent areas in which His power is not yet dominant. This theory offers, of course, a quick and apparently impressive answer to such a problem as that of the British officer. Why did this man have so many disasters? This theory asserts that God did not want him to have any of them. As a matter of fact, they represented distinct frustrations of the divine desire. God's wish was that this man should be healthy and happy and prosperous, but situations which God could not manage interfered, and finally a disease that was beyond God's control brought on death. This theory of a finite, struggling God has been popularized in our time by William James and H. G. Wells. In Mr. Wells' widely read novel *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* the theory is stated with characteristic vividness:

> After all, the real God of the Christians is not God Almighty but Christ—a poor, mocked, and wounded God nailed

on a cross of matter. Some day He will triumph, but it is not fair to say that He causes all things now. God is not absolute, He is finite. A finite God who struggles against evil in His great way as we struggle against it in our weak and silly way—that is the essence of all real religion.

But anyone who thinks carefully about this theory will soon detect its fatal weaknesses. If God is not really in control of our universe, what is? What is this rival power, and where did it come from? Furthermore, if God is not in control now, have we any real reason to believe He will ever be in control? What if He were permanently as well as temporarily blocked by such things as human sin, cancer, and death? The more we consider this theory the less satisfying the notion of a balked, bewildered, and half-helpless God seems. If there is a God at all, He must be stronger and more resourceful than that. Instinctively and inevitably we think of Him as the Creator rather than the Victim of the universe.

III

If we thus reject these current explanations of the world's suffering, what theory do we ourselves advance? Before attempting to answer that question, let us recall two facts about the pain in the world which are often forgotten. One is that a surprisingly large proportion of the tragedies in life are traceable directly or indirectly to human beings themselves. We must not blame God for them, nor do we need to assume the burden of reconciling them with His purposes. As a matter of fact, we ourselves are responsible for them.

To begin with, it is clear that human sin and stupidity bring on an immense amount of pain —all of it essentially needless. The World War, with its endless train of agonies, was clearly the product of human blunders. God had nothing to do with its origin, and it must have seemed even more of a tragedy to Him than it did to us. Again, the changes that men themselves bring into the realm of Nature produce, more than once, far-reaching disasters. The vast mechanisms of the natural world are

thrown out of gear or forced to operate in abnormal ways, and dire suffering follows. The recent floods in the Mississippi Valley offer a clear illustration. As long as the great river was allowed to manage itself, solve its own problems, and store its occasional overflow in numberless swamps all along its course, there was no catastrophe for human beings. But when men insisted on restricting the vast stream in a thousand ways, draining its swamps, and building their cities literally beneath its waves, then the stage was set for an ultimate disaster. The pain and loss that finally resulted must not be attributed either to God or to Nature. Man must take the blame himself. "It is not Nature's fault if man persists in building villages on the flanks of Vesuvius. Neither is it Nature's fault if he exposes himself recklessly to parasites like the hookworm. Certainly Nature is not responsible if our careless disposal of crumbs brings on a plague of rats, and the rats in turn bring on the Black Death with its destruction of a third of the population of England. Many of

the evils in our world are not of God's appointing. Rather they are of man's approving." [5]

A second fact we should bear in mind as we attempt to explain the suffering in the world is this. Many situations which seem to us at the moment both stupid and cruel reveal themselves ultimately as part of a process which is —judged by its total effect—both wise and kind. President Eliot of Harvard used to give an illustration drawn from his own experience on the Maine coast: "A fierce north-easter drives a number of vessels off their course, and wrecks a few on the ruthless rocks. Lives and property are lost. But that same storm which brings disaster to shipping, waters the crops on ten thousand farms and fills the springs which later yield to millions of men and animals their necessary drink. We must be sure to give due consideration to the good side of every event which has two sides."

Once a man recognizes the truth of this principle the world about him begins to lose many of its most sinister aspects. You and I

[5] J. A. Thompson, *Science and Religion*, p. 221.

are distressed when we find that selfishness, pugnacity, and physical instincts create year by year an immense amount of pain for millions of people. All too often we forget that each one of these impulses has its distinct place and its profound value, and that humanity would never have found its way up from the dust without them. We are disheartened when we learn that many elements in our environment are relentlessly hostile, and that life crowds upon us the necessity for unceasing struggle. All too often we overlook the fact that this very situation has driven humanity forward century by century, and has developed within the race whatever courage, intelligence, and resourcefulness it possesses. We are bewildered when we find sickness sweeping away frail children and weaklings of all ages, and when we learn that those who have a poor physique must guard themselves incessantly against disease. All too often we forget that this law of the survival of the fit—undoubtedly cruel as far as individuals are concerned—is the thing which has given the race as a whole

the physical stamina and mental power it now enjoys. Had the life-process given the boon of survival to every living thing—fit or unfit, strong or weak, wise or stupid—there would have been no inherent tendency in living creatures to improve as one generation succeeded another.

It is all too easy to take a short view of life and exaggerate the evils of the world, just as it is all too easy to blame on God and Nature unhappy situations for which we ourselves are responsible. Granted that no one can explain fully why all living forms have been forced to struggle toward perfection rather than enjoy divinely established perfection from the first. We must not paint the world and its strange processes any blacker than they are. We must recognize the fact that more than once they reveal—if we only give them time—an indubitable wisdom and kindness.

IV

Granting all this, can we explain even in part the elements of suffering which we do find

in the world? The explanation some of us offer can be stated simply. We believe that the essential purpose of our existence here is the development of our finer powers. This may be, of course, a wholly false interpretation of life. There may be no purpose whatever in the presence of the human race on the Earth, or the purpose may be some secret and hidden thing which our minds have not even surmised as yet. But granting the fact that our interpretation of life is a guess, we can still point out that this particular guess has been made by thousands of thoughtful people in every generation. As the years have passed, and as these men and women have had the chance to study widely and think deeply, they have come to the conclusion that existence here does have a purpose, and that this purpose is the development of our finer powers. We find here in the world what seem to be deliberately planned situations through which we can—if we will—build into ourselves and others such priceless qualities as intelligence, resourcefulness, fortitude, and kindness. Suppose this is the true

answer to the riddle of life. Suppose God's aim here is to develop human personalities. What kind of a world did God have to create if that purpose were to be fulfilled?

Obviously it had to be a world of law, a world of rigid and predictable sequences. If two and two made four to-day and five to-morrow, human beings would never be able to profit by the experience of the past or prepare wisely for the problems of the future. Similarly it had to be a world in which human beings came in close contact with each other, and had a certain influence over each other's destiny. A knowledge of mathematical truths might be attained by hermits living solitary lives on separate islands, but such qualities as tolerance, kindness, and loyalty to the common welfare could be gained only if men were gathered into groups and forced to live and work together. Here, then, was the kind of world which God had to make if human personalities were to develop within it. It had to be a world of law, and it had to be a world of social relationships. But such a world held, obviously,

the possibility of infinite suffering. Until men learned what the laws of Nature were and how they could be controlled there were sure to be innumerable disasters. Similarly until men learned how to live together without oppression, injustice, and violence there were bound to be countless sufferings. Did God want all this pain? Of course not! But He did want to develop in us such qualities as intelligence, courage, ability to achieve, and willingness to sacrifice ourselves for others. And the only way in which He could achieve that end was to run the risk—and force us to run the risk—of suffering and disaster.

Perhaps an illustration will make this important point clear. Here is a father who wants to develop the latent abilities of his son. He believes that the boy has the possibility of becoming a wise and a useful man, and his dearest desire is to bring out the finer qualities in the boy's nature. What does the father do? He sends the boy to school, to camp, to college, and finally on a long trip through foreign lands. Of course each one of those experiences

is fraught with possible disaster. In school the boy may learn bad habits rather than good ones. In camp he may meet a serious accident instead of gaining greater physical strength. In college he may actually break down in the attempt to adjust himself to a new and strange environment. The trip abroad may subject the boy to temptations that will be too much for him, and he may return home with false ideas and ideals that will handicap him throughout life. Yet the father deliberately subjects his son to these experiences, though time after time they have proved and still prove disastrous. Why? Because the father knows that only through such discipline can the boy be led out into the splendor of maturity. Pain and suffering in our world? We meet them everywhere. Yet when all is said, has not this same world—cruel though it often seems—proved a surprisingly effective training ground for character?

All this makes plain the attitude many of us try to take when we meet our share of the world's hardships and tragedies. We never

say that these disasters were deliberately inflicted on us by God as punishments, reminders, or disciplines. Rather we say that they represent the risks God and we assume together in a world which is designed to develop our finer powers, but which is not yet thoroughly understood or controlled by human beings. If as the result of someone's ignorance, our own sin, or sheer coincidence, we meet a crushing disaster, we try to keep our courage and our faith in God and life. We know that the divine Love never deserts us and never tries to hurt us. We know that God, like the men and women who have caught His spirit and His wisdom, is always seeking to help us out of our misery rather than thrust us deeper into it. And with a faith that grows firmer with the years we trust God to give us another chance at life beyond the strange experience of death. After all, if this existence is a training it must be a training for something. If the training is not finished here it must be completed elsewhere. We look through and beyond death, and when we do that we

begin to share with Jesus, and with those who have caught His courage and His faith, "the victory that overcomes the world."

Grow old along with me,
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made.
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half. Trust God, see all, nor be afraid."

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage,
Life's struggle having so far reached its term.
Thence I shall pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute, a god though in the germ.

So take and use Thy work,
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim.
My times be in Thy hand,
Perfect the cup as planned,
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same! [6]

[6] Robert Browning.

Chapter V

WHERE DO WE MEET GOD IN EVERYDAY LIFE?

I

In a recent article on the religious situation in our colleges Dr. Wicks of Mt. Holyoke College makes this interesting statement:

> The main difficulty with undergraduate religion today is sheer vagueness. Ask a group of students if they can describe an experience of God, or if they can point to any definite situation in which God's life touches ours, and they will stare at you in blank amazement. These young people have many notions about God, some intelligent and others not. They can argue about God at great length. But as for recognizing God in daily life they are utterly at sea. It is out of the vagueness

that we must lead them to something real, concrete, and satisfying.

Of course this particular difficulty is not limited to students. It is the spiritual problem of numberless older people as well. They believe there is a God, some kind of a Wise Power working in our universe. But what that Power is like, or where and how it meets us, they have little idea. Professor Pratt of Williams tells of a young minister who recklessly asked the members of his congregation what their idea of God was. One deacon finally confessed with some embarrassment, "When anyone says 'God' the thing I think of is a kind of white, oblong blur."

Why has this situation arisen? Why are people to-day so vague about God and our experience of Him? The roots of our present difficulty reach far back into the past. For more than a century scientific investigations have been disproving many of the ancient beliefs about God's activities and our contacts with Him. Think, for example, of the way in which science has gradually changed our inter-

pretation of spectacular events within the realm of Nature—thunderstorms, earthquakes, eclipses, and the like. For centuries men believed implicitly that these things were God's doing, and that in them He could be seen at work. To-day anyone who interprets such occurrences religiously is laughed to scorn. We can gauge the magnitude of this change in our attitude if we turn back to a sermon preached in the Old South Church of Boston in 1755. Benjamin Franklin had recently perfected his lightning-rods, and property owners throughout New England were beginning to install them on houses and barns. But there were strong religious objections to this practice. Many people felt that one of God's clearest ways of showing displeasure was to send thunder and lightning. Hence any interference with these things was an interference with divine warnings. While the controversy was at its height a succession of sharp earthquake shocks was felt in the section near Boston. Dr. Thomas Prince, pastor of the Old South Church of that city, promptly preached

a sermon in which he advanced the theory that the earthquake was an evidence of God's anger at the lightning-rods. We can still read his strange words: "In Boston more of the iron points are erected than anywhere else in New England, and Boston seems more dreadfully shaken. Oh, there is no getting out of the mighty hand of God!" How incredible such preaching seems to-day! Our generation would never dream of interpreting earthquakes and thunderstorms as divine warnings.

Our views of personal religious experience have suffered an equally radical change. Many things which our forefathers saw as divine visitations we now see as psychic disturbances or even as symptoms of mental disease. It is this shift in our point of view which makes Bible reading—and still more, Bible teaching—such a hazardous undertaking for the unwary. The men who wrote the Bible accepted the common belief of antiquity that strange inner experiences were usually attributable to God. Hence they said that dreams came from Him, that visions were His gift, and that the sudden

power to speak in a strange language was an evidence of His presence and power. To-day none of us interprets dreams as divine messages, and we all feel that the habit of seeing visions or indulging in ecstatic utterances is an evidence of mental weakness rather than religious inspiration. Here again the records of the recent past show how far and how fast we have traveled on the road of scientific knowledge. In a collection of conversion narratives made by Professor Starbuck you will find this curious incident. A man who was converted during the past century is giving his account of what happened and his interpretation of the experience:

> I found myself staggering toward the Holiness Tent. It was full of seekers, and there was a terrible uproar inside. Some people were groaning, others laughing, and others shouting. Near an oak tree some ten feet away I fell on my face and tried to pray. But every time I called on God something like a huge hand strangled me. I thought I should die if I could

> not get help, but just as often as I started to pray that hand was on my throat and my breath was cut off. Finally I made a desperate effort to call on God for mercy. The last thing I remember was falling back on the ground with that hand clutching my throat. When I came to myself a crowd was standing around me praising God. The very heavens seemed to open and pour down rays of light and glory. All day and all night those floods of light streamed through my soul. O how I was changed! Everything and everybody seemed new.[1]

The writers of antiquity would have regarded that experience as the direct activity of God. The convert himself clearly held that view. But most of us to-day are skeptical. We feel that God had little or nothing to do with that wild scene. We are convinced that mob psychology, religious excitement, and ordinary hysterics were responsible. When the century-

[1] Quoted by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 250.

old beliefs about God's activity in the world without and the world within are thus changing it is not surprising that current ideas about God's dealings with us are vague. We are living in an age in which the old convictions are largely discredited and the new convictions are just beginning to take shape.

II

Where, according to modern teachers, do we meet God in everyday life? If we no longer encounter Him in the spectacular, where do we find Him? Our theory is that there are certain natural and normal situations in which God is at work among us. In and through these situations we come in contact with Him, though we never "meet" Him in any physical sense. Perhaps an illustration will make our theory clear. Here are two boys in college together. The older invites the younger to spend a week-end in his home. The younger boy is delighted at the invitation, particularly as it will give him an opportunity to become acquainted with his friend's father. But when

the two boys reach home they find to their chagrin that the father has been unexpectedly called away and will not return for several days. In the literal sense of the word the younger boy will not "meet" this father at all. Yet in another sense he meets him constantly in the life of that home. He talks with the different members of the family, and on each he sees the indelible stamp of the father's personality. He enters the family living-room, and in the books and magazines, the pictures and the curios he finds a clear reflection of the father's aims and interests. The next morning he discovers that careful and definite plans have been made for his entertainment, and throughout the visit he finds the thoughtfulness of the father revealing itself in a dozen ways. Granted that this boy never sees the father face to face. He does encounter his personality, his influence, his endeavors. Suppose we picture our contact with God in terms like these. It is clear that we never see Him in a literal sense, and it seems increasingly plain that the strange and spectacular experi-

ences of life are unconnected with Him. Yet there are—so it seems to some of us—familiar situations and normal experiences in which we do come in contact with this Other Self. We might mention two in the world without, and then two in the world within.

III

First of all, some of us are convinced that we meet God in the beauty of the natural world. The loveliness there is not of our manufacture or our imagination. It confronts us when we enter life, and it makes its own convincing appeal to every sensitive human spirit. We realize, of course, that scientists have now discovered the mechanical processes by which this beauty is produced. They can tell us where the red and gold of the sunset come from, and why the leaves turn scarlet in October. But to some of us this new and technical knowledge suggests a profound question about the universe itself. How did it happen that these particular processes were set up at all? Were they the result of sheer chance,

or do we see in them the purpose of some Vast Mind that loves beauty for its own sake? It seems to us that this universal loveliness must be the work of God. We confess that it is created in each particular instance by a process which science has now analyzed and which scientists now show goes on in purely mechanical fashion. But we believe that behind all these processes is a God who at the beginning willed a universe of splendor rather than one of ugliness, just as behind the mechanical processes that go on within a factory stands the creative intelligence of an engineer who devised and installed the machinery with certain clearly defined aims in view. Thus as we meet the beauty of Nature we meet God. Looking through that beauty we discern Him. One of our modern poets has stated this conviction in lines of singular charm.

Forgive me, God, because I barred my door.
They said your face bore marks of heavy care
And endless time, and I could never bear
That you should touch my little house before.
Then April, flinging wide my window there,
Let all your sunshine stream across my floor.

I feel you in the wind spring-drenched and free,
And in the pale, new leaves. Your freshness seems
Like that of buds in rain. Your dawns begin
In splendor, and your wonder steals to me
Like children's clinging fingers in my dreams.
Why, you were beauty all the time . . . come in![2]

A second situation in the outside world in which we believe we meet God is this. The sweep of history reveals a movement that is indubitably upward and forward. In the long run human life grows appreciably wiser, kinder, more able to control the blind energies of the universe and direct them toward beneficent ends. If we compare to-day with yesterday, or even with a year ago, we may find few evidences of this forward and upward movement. There may even be traces of unhappy regression. But if we take an appreciable span of time—three, four, or ten centuries—the progress of the race is hardly to be questioned. In that progress some of us believe God is to be seen.

One of the incidents at the end of the War brought a striking illustration of human ad-

[2] Helen C. LeCron.

vance during the last eight or nine centuries. When General Allenby entered Jerusalem on February 21, 1918, an enterprising journalist thought it would be interesting to look up the account of the capture of the city by Allenby's predecessors, the Crusaders of the eleventh century. Did the same things happen then and now? When Godfrey of France led the Crusaders into the Holy City in 1099 his first act was to slaughter some ten thousand Saracens, and then burn alive the Jews who had taken refuge in their synagogues. One of the clergy connected with the conquering army left this vivid account of the day of victory:

> On that day Godfrey shed quantities of blood almost beyond belief. When our men finally mastered the walls of the city and the towers wonderful things were to be seen. Numbers of the Saracens were beheaded, others were shot with arrows or forced to jump from the towers, and still others were slowly tortured and then burned. In the streets and open places of Jerusalem were seen piles of heads and

hands and feet, and one rode everywhere among the bodies of men and horses.

Granted that there may be elements of exaggeration in that medieval chronicle. After we have made due allowance for them the scene still remains distinctly gruesome.

What happened when the same city was captured again by Europeans in 1918? General Allenby's first act was to issue a proclamation assuring everyone of tolerance, justice, and protection. Then he placed a guard of Indian troops around the Mosque of Omar to make sure that Mohammedans would not be interrupted in their worship. Then the streets were cleaned, the city's sanitation was immensely improved, food supplies were brought in, and a campaign against cholera, typhus, and smallpox was begun. Granted that war and bloodshed still persisted, and that the British régime may not have been perfect. When all is said, appreciable gains were recorded during the centuries between the two captures of that city. Tolerance increased, scientific knowledge grew immeasurably, and the primi-

tive lust for revenge and slaughter was—to some extent at least—controlled. Again and again we meet these evidences of progress as we study the long record of human life. Are they the result of blind chance and sheer coincidence? Some of us can never think so. Behind the innumerable processes that are slowly building a wiser and kinder world we see the Living God. Granted that the gains are made in mechanical rather than miraculous fashion, and that the vast world-process seems to go on automatically and give no evidence of interruptions from outside. Behind all these mechanisms we discern the Great Creator, willing a universe that would forever change and grow, and move persistently in the right rather than the wrong direction.

> The outworn rite, the old abuse,
> The pious fraud transparent grown,
> The good held captive in the use
> Of wrong alone,
>
> These wait their doom from that great law
> Which makes a past time serve today,
> And fresher life the world shall draw
> From their decay.

For life shall on and upward go,
The eternal step of progress beats
To that great anthem calm and slow
Which God repeats.

He works in all things, all obey
His first propulsion from the night;
Wait then and watch, the world is gray
With morning light![8]

IV

What are the situations in the world within in which we see God? Here the problem becomes more difficult because all the data are individual and personal in their nature. In the case of the beauty of Nature or the progress revealed by history, we can appeal to objective facts evident to any competent observer. When we turn, however, to the world within we enter a realm where everything is subjective and where each man can, from the very nature of the case, speak only for himself. Some of us, however, studying our own experience and the experience of the people we know intimately, have reached two conclusions about

[8] John G. Whittier.

God's dealings with human beings. The first is that when we find our own inner needs supplied—the need for guidance, for poise, for sustaining strength—then and there we meet God. We grant of course that the help that comes to us at such times comes through mental and physical processes which can be charted and explained by scientists. But we believe that these processes are set in motion by God, and that behind them—as behind the processes that create beauty or make human life grow richer with the passing years—we can discern Him.

One of the recent volumes on modern religious problems gives a vivid illustration of our theory.[4] The young man who related this experience was a graduate student at one of our American universities:

> I had been separated from my wife and children for over a year. I felt I must continue my studies, but naturally I wanted to have my family together. This

[4] H. N. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method*, p. 225.

could be done only in case I could find a particular type of part-time work. I received a tentative offer of a position, applied for it, made a poor impression on my prospective employer, and finally at the end of an exhausting day was told that I could not have the place. I shall never forget the long ride home that night. I finally got to bed about two in the morning, but I was too tired to sleep. The next day I went about my work as best I could, but in the afternoon I came home to have things out with myself. I spent about four hours alone in my room, sometimes praying and sometimes just thinking. Gradually the almost unendurable pain that had possessed me passed away, and a great gladness and courage filled my heart. The external situation remained just what it had been, but I began to feel inwardly able to go ahead, do my best, and take what came. There were no evidences of hysteria or hallucination in the experience. My anguish simply

vanished and courage and peace came in. Best of all they stayed with me permanently.

Did that help come from purely natural sources—from the act of physical relaxation, the act of accepting the inevitable, some curious psychic overturn which revealed new and unsuspected powers? Probably the help came in all these ways. But behind these processes stood God, the God who works through existing mechanisms rather than in spite of them. If you are in distress and need, one of your friends can send you sympathy, encouragement, and tangible help by means of a message written on a typewriter, then despatched over a telegraph wire, and finally delivered to you through the device we call a telephone. These mechanisms do not, of course, generate the message or create the help. They serve merely as means of transmission, agencies by which a friendly personality sends you an assistance which the typewriter, the telegraph, and the telephone by themselves could never produce. That is our theory about God. Through the

mental and physical processes with which science has now made us familiar He brings us the help and the deliverance we need. "He shall call upon me and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble and deliver him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation." Again and again men have had the experience of finding help. And again and again they have looked behind the experience to discover God.

The other experience in which we meet God is this. Within us all is an ineradicable impulse toward kindness. Repeatedly it urges us to forget ourselves and enrich life for others. All of us feel this impulse when we are confronted by the helplessness of little children, the need of the aged, and the suffering of the sick. Instinctively we ask what we can do to help. Sometimes this impulse to kindness expresses itself in singularly definite form. We all know what it is to feel impelled to do a particular thing for a particular person, and do it at once. In these impulses toward kindness some of us believe we see God. Granted

that the instinct of sympathy is part of the original equipment of human nature. Granted that the spirit of kindness has been immeasurably strengthened by the developments of civilized life. Granted that particular impulses toward generosity and devotion may be connected with mental mechanisms of memory, association, imagination, and the like. We believe that God makes use of all this existing machinery, and through it leads us to help other people or leads other people to help us.

During the early part of the War one of our American magazines published several letters which had been written on the battlefield and recovered by Red Cross workers. Here is a note written by a French officer who was on the verge of death. The Red Cross detachment arrived just too late to save his life, but this half-finished letter was clutched in his hand. It was addressed to his fiancée, an American girl in Paris.

> There are two other wounded men near me, and I guess there isn't much hope for them either. The Scotchman has one of

his legs shattered, and the German has a bad piece of shrapnel in his side. When I came to, they were both bending over me trying to give me first aid. The Scotchman was pouring water down my throat, and the German was trying to staunch my wound with an antiseptic preparation given him before the attack by his own medical corps. In spite of their own intense suffering they were both doing their best to help me. By and by when I was thoroughly conscious the German gave each of us an injection of morphine and took one himself. Then the pain began to let up wonderfully, and we talked together as best we could. About home, of course. Both those poor fellows had been married less than a year.

There the letter suddenly stops. What do we see in such a scene? The horror of war, of course. But also human kindness. And beyond that kindness, God. "God is love. Everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God."

You want to meet God in your life? Begin the new day with this prayer: "Some thoughts from God, old or new, will come to me to-day. Duties He has arranged and opportunities He has devised will stand before me. The strength, wisdom, and endurance He provides will emerge within my heart. Let me face these new hours open-eyed, open-eared, open-hearted. God Himself is seeking me. I may overlook Him in the disguise of the commonplace, or fail to recognize Him in simple tasks and familiar situations. But there God is, looking for me. Let me have Christ's faith, Christ's insight, above all Christ's unfaltering love. Then I shall see God, and God will be able to make full use of me."

Chapter VI

HOW DOES GOD SPEAK TO US?

I

This question involves one of the most interesting problems in personal religion. We might begin our discussion of it by quoting a familiar passage in the Old Testament:

> And Elijah came unto Horeb, the mount of God, and lodged in a cave. And a great and strong wind rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire a still, small voice; and when Elijah heard it he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood

> in the entering in of the cave. And a voice came unto him and said: What doest thou here, Elijah?

What was it that Elijah heard? Was it God's voice or merely his own imagination? If it was God's voice, how did that voice come?

Anyone who considers this subject carefully will soon realize that it goes to the very heart of vital religion. In every instance the great religious leaders of the race have been convinced that a divine message and commission had come to them. On this point they entertained no slightest doubt. As a matter of fact much of their power and assurance grew out of this sense of God's call. Consider the testimony of Isaiah: "I heard the voice of the Lord saying: Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Then I said: Here am I, Lord. Send me." Or think of Jesus' conviction: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He hath anointed me." Or come down to Martin Luther. This same sense of a divine commission echoes through the words of his stirring hymn:

> And though this world with devils filled
> Should threaten to undo us,
> We will not fear, for God hath willed
> His truth to triumph through us!

Whether we agree with these men or not, there is no question what they believed. They were convinced that God's word had come to them. He had spoken, and had given them the work they were trying to do.

In our own time great numbers of people have this same conviction. They may not care to discuss their beliefs about themselves and their careers with outsiders, any more than they care to read their love letters in public. Furthermore they may find that their own sense of a divine call fluctuates from year to year. But variable or not, and secret or not, there it is—never to be wholly forgotten, overlooked, or destroyed. One of the most useful men of the last century was the English philanthropist, Lord Ashley. When some ninety years ago he began his work for the under-privileged children of England he found conditions among them which seem incredible to-day.

Waifs of four, five, and six years of age were being gathered off the streets and out of the orphanages, and shipped by the wagon-load to cotton mills. There they were put to work in twelve- and fifteen-hour shifts, until like fragile flowers they withered and died. Meantime other children were being corralled to clean chimneys. One man was found in London who had a whole troop of undersized boys and girls working at that awful trade. The youngest child, a boy four and a half years of age, was saved to work in the narrowest and dirtiest chimneys. When the little fellow rebelled or hesitated a wisp of lighted straw was held against the soles of his bare feet, and in pain and terror he clambered upward. For half a century Lord Ashley gave his life for these helpless children. On one page of his diary we find these moving words: "Busier than ever today. A new lodging-house to care for. A Ragged School, and a Thieves' Refuge. My Vagrant Bill before Parliament. No wonder people think me as small as my work. Yet I would not change it. Surely God has

called me to this career." All the way through the centuries, from Elijah on ancient Horeb to Lord Ashley in modern London, you hear those solemn words—"God has called me." Is there any truth in them? Does God really speak to human hearts?

II

The tendency of many people to-day, particularly young people, is to reject outright any such idea. These modern critics say, usually with a certain tone of condescension: "The men and women who claim to hear God's voice belong to a highly imaginative and essentially unstable human type. Their own overexcited fancy generates the sense of divine nearness and divine mission. Then this feeling, wholly unfounded though it is, creates a definite superiority complex which in turn provides an enormous psychical stimulus. Thus these people become effective leaders of their generation though—as a matter of sober fact—they are as thoroughly deluded as the individuals who claim to see ghosts or hear spirits." These objections, phrased in one form or

another, are sure to be raised whenever experiences like those we were describing are quoted. What reply can we make to them?

We can point out, to begin with, that if we wave aside jauntily all these experiences of a divine call we dub as delusions the deepest and most significant experiences of literally millions of people. It is hard to believe that all these individuals were utterly deceived. We find in the group every one of the great religious leaders of the race, Jesus included. We also find an immense number of people who have had at some single instant in life a clear sense of divine guidance. The difference between the second group and the first is, of course, only one of degree. Men like Isaiah and Jesus, Luther, and Lord Ashley seemed to see their whole career clearly laid out before them. The men and women in the second group have no such clear vision of life as a whole, but they do feel at special moments and in particular situations that God is calling them to a particular task. Beyond these two groups, familiar in all the annals of religion,

is still a third group which skeptics almost invariably forget. It is made up of the men and women who have a strong and persistent sense of mission but who for various reasons do not ascribe the feeling to God. They usually say it comes from some such large and indefinite reality as "Duty" or "the Universe" or "the Life-principle." Here is essentially the same inner experience as that of religiously minded individuals, but in this case it is not referred to a divine source. Consider the confession of one of our modern poets. Her sense of mission is obvious, but it is ascribed to "our Ancient Mother." Substitute for that phrase the word "God," and you will find a perfect description of the experience of numberless religious people.

She is wise, our Ancient Mother,
  Her ways are not our ways;
We cannot circumscribe her
  Though we watch her all our days.

On each of her questioning children
  She presses a different will;
To one she says, "Keep busy,"
  To one she says, "Keep still."

She said to me, "Wait and listen,
I have plenty to drive and do;
Then once in a while when you are sure
Speak out a word or two." [1]

Granted it is possible that all these people, ranging from Jesus to the modern poet, are thoroughly deceived, as millions of people were deceived when they believed in ghosts. It seems more reasonable to say that behind all these experiences lies some element of truth. Around that element of truth there may be large accretions of fancy, legend, and sheer superstition, but at the core lies something real. Can we discover what that bit of reality is?

III

Many people to-day, reading the records of mystical experience, are puzzled by three recurrent situations. One is that accounts of hearing God's voice are often couched in strange and even fantastic language. Isaiah's description of his experience with God contains references to seraphim, voices, and

[1] Karle W. Baker.

a cloud of smoke that filled the Temple. Medieval mystics lapse into the same use of the bizarre. Saint Hildegarde, the German mystic of the twelfth century, gives this account of her visions of the divine:

> The brightness which I see is not limited by space, and it is more brilliant than the radiance around the sun. I cannot measure its height or length or breadth. Its name (which has been given me) is "Shade of the Living Light." Within that brightness I sometimes see another light, for which the name "Living Light" has been given. When and how I see this I cannot tell, but when I do see it all sadness and pain are lifted from me, and I am a simple girl again and an old woman no longer.

Does this curious language not discredit the experience? Can we trust people who saw—or claimed to see—such strange sights?

The next time that situation seems disturbing turn to a book of poetry. What extraordi-

nary figures of speech imaginative people use when they try to describe the experience of love, and the sheer joy of comradeship with the person who means most! Begin with Robert Burns:

> O my Love's like a red, red rose
> That's newly sprung in June;
> O my Love's like the melodie
> That's sweetly played in tune.

Taken literally, and interpreted by a person with a prosaic mind, those words are sheer nonsense. How could any human being be like a rose and also like a melody? But read as poetry, and interpreted as brilliant and suggestive symbols of an inner experience of joy, those words gain a superb meaning. When attempts to describe human love thus resort to symbolism, we must not be surprised to find that attempts to describe companionship with God do the same thing. In both cases we must press back of the symbolic language and try to sense the vivid inner experience. Literal interpretations here, as in most religious writings, are worse than useless.

A second situation which disturbs many people to-day as they study the mystical experience is this. Hundreds of individuals who claim to hear God's voice are—as far as outsiders can judge—pitifully mistaken. They wholly misinterpret the divine will, or they count as God's message something which has no possible relation to Him. The men in the Middle Ages who were responsible for religious persecutions belong in this class. Practically all of them were convinced they acted under divine orders, yet to-day we realize they were motivated by fear, bigotry, and (more than once) sheer jealousy. In our own time many men and women, loudly advertising a divine guidance, lapse into pitiful blunders and crude stupidities. Do not situations like these, recurring constantly in human life, discredit the mystical experience?

For your answer turn to the record that has been made and is still being made in another sphere of human experience. The history of medicine, as any well-informed physician will confess, is filled with strange chapters and dis-

creditable incidents. The medicine men of antiquity gave their patients nauseating doses, failed to recognize the simplest ailments, and more than once actually brought on death. Even to-day ignorant individuals—some deluded themselves, and others tricksters of the meanest type—claim powers which every sensible person knows they do not possess, and advertise remedies which are utterly fraudulent. But does this mass of ignorance and humbug give us the right to denounce all physicians, and say there is no element of truth in medical science? Neither do the blunders of religious fanatics nor the ignorance of medieval believers give us the right to dub as delusions the entirely different experiences of normal men and women. Turn, for example, to the lines in which Matthew Arnold describes a phase of mysticism which is familiar to many of us:

> Often in the world's most crowded streets
> And often in the din of strife
> There rises an unspeakable desire,
> A longing to inquire
> Into the mystery of this heart that beats

So wild, so deep in us; to know
Whence our thoughts come and where they go.
Then vague and forlorn
From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
Come airs and floating echoes,
A bolt is shot back somewhere in the breast,
The eye sinks inward and the heart lies plain.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
And then he knows
The hills where his life rose
And the sea to which it goes.

Surely the experience of such men cannot be discredited by the extravagances of abnormal or ignorant individuals.

The third fact which puzzles many people to-day as they think about God's dealings with us is this. Psychologists have now discovered and described many of the curious mechanisms operating within the human brain. They can tell us where our ideas come from, how they work their way into the center of attention, and what extraordinary effects they finally produce not only in the mind but also in the body. The process of gaining an idea and then being immensely stimulated by it is now thoroughly understood and mechanically

explained. In such a situation where is there room for an outside agency called God? Can we not leave Him out of consideration entirely, and reduce both inward inspiration and outward action to the interplay of the mechanisms within the personality?

But the answer to these questions is apparent to anyone who studies mechanisms and the principles on which they operate. There on your desk is a telephone, a mechanical device of almost incredible ingenuity and effectiveness. Scores of tiny parts are fitted together with deft precision and work in accordance with intricate but well-understood laws. An electrician can explain what happens at each stage of a telephone conversation, and can point out what tiny devices are brought successively into play. But does this imply that the telephone generates its own messages? On the contrary, it is a means deliberately used by one intelligence to bring messages to another. We all admit that the brain has its mechanisms, and that the processes that go on during a so-called religious experience can be studied and

described in purely mechanical terms. We all realize that a particular idea or ideal, long buried within the memory, can be brought from its hiding-place, thrust into the center of attention, and finally be made the means of reintegrating an entire personality. But we believe that the Living God can and does make use of these mechanisms, and through them sends His messages and His inspirations to us. Discovering the machinery of the process does not eliminate God, any more than discovering the mechanics of a telephone conversation proves that the messages that come through the instrument are self-generated. Modern psychology does not "sweep God out of human life." Rather it shows the means by which God works.

IV

Suppose we carry our discussion one step further. If God does speak to human beings, how does He do it? What are the ways in which His messages come to normal people to-day?

Some of us are convinced, to begin with,

that God meets us on the higher ranges of our inner life. What are these higher ranges? One is our reason. When we learn to think—think clearly, accurately, and consistently—we fit ourselves to receive the truth God is always trying to give. Or to change the figure of speech, we develop within ourselves a mechanism through which God can communicate more and more clearly with us. Nothing is more false than the notion that intelligence and deep religious experience cannot go together. Thousands of men and women can bear witness that their sense of God grew stronger and their consciousness of His guidance grew clearer as they disciplined their minds by study and careful thought. Surely a God of intelligence and order—and the Creator of a universe like ours must have those qualities—can communicate more clearly and more constantly with a well-trained and an orderly mind than He can with a slovenly and an ignorant one. There is a passage which Cotton Mather wrote in his diary more than two centuries ago which many of our contemporaries would do well to study:

There is a thought which I have often had in my mind, but I would now lay upon myself a charge to have it oftener there. The light of reason is the law of God, the voice of reason is the voice of God. We never have to do with reason but at the same time we have to do with God, and our submission to the rules of reason is an obedience to God. As often as I have evident reason set before me let me think upon it. Therein the great God speaks to me.

Another one of the higher ranges of the human personality is the sense of beauty. Animals seem to lack it entirely. Little children reveal it only fitfully. But in matured personalities it is a striking trait. Loveliness in any form makes an instant appeal, and within these minds rises an inevitable response. How often this sense of beauty proves a gateway through which God's inspirations flood the soul!

I heard a bird at break of day
Sing from the autumn trees
A song so mystical and calm,
So full of certainties,

No man I think could listen long
Except upon his knees;
Yet this was but a simple bird
Alone, among dead trees.[2]

That poem bears the perfect title "Overtones." Above and beyond and through these elements of beauty this poet heard what thousands of sensitive souls have heard—the still, small Voice. God, speaking through beauty.

Our second conviction about God's dealings with us is this. When God thus approaches us on the higher levels of life He gives us definite ideas and inspirations. It is in this way that He communicates with us, bringing the insight and guidance and sustaining power which we need and which He is ever seeking to give. As long as we picture God's messages coming in essentially miraculous and erratic ways, either through startling events in the world without or startling experiences in the world within, we shall find it more and more difficult to answer the objections raised by modern science. But as soon as we realize that God's way of reaching us and influencing us

[2] William A. Percy.

is to work quietly through the mechanisms of our own higher nature, rousing an old ideal or bringing a new purpose into the center of attention, then most of our difficulties will disappear. You and I clearly have the power to implant ideas and impulses in the minds of other people. We do it in any one of a dozen ways—through the spoken or the written word, through a look or a gesture or even by protracted silence. Is it impossible to believe that God has His own way of doing the thing which we do so easily and constantly?

When one turns from theory to actual experience it seems clear that this is the way in which God influences our lives. When our spirit has been made sensitive, either by our own deliberate efforts or by some deep experience coming to us from without, God pours into our waiting mind the ideas that lead us into the path of His choosing or give us renewed strength and endurance for the duties that are already clear. Rufus Jones gives this illustration from his own experience:

I had a friend who went alone one day to consult a famous London doctor. This friend was highly gifted, and was on the threshold of a promising career in many lines. Everything that makes life rich and great seemed to stand before him. But with almost killing frankness the doctor told him that he was the victim of a subtle and baffling disease which would gradually destroy both his hearing and his sight, and then seriously affect his memory. This man left the doctor's office and stood stunned on the sidewalk outside. All the large plans he had been making for his life began to collapse like a house of blocks. But while he stood there wondering what to do, he felt himself suddenly surrounded by the invading love of God. Beaten though he was, a sense of unutterable peace filled his heart. Thus there emerged within him a new source of energy which changed his despair into enduring hope and joy, and gave him all

through life an extraordinary power and influence.[3]

How could such a momentous change be wrought, first in that man's inner and then in his outer attitude? God could do it by waking within his mind in that moment of crisis an idea that had been implanted there years before: "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee. The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath thee are the Everlasting Arms." Grant God's power to bring such ideas into human consciousness in moments of great need or heightened sensitivity, and you open the way for God to deal with us day after day—giving us the guidance, the wisdom, the endurance, and the faith in ourselves and in Him which finally make us "more than conquerors."

As torrents in summer
Half-dried in their channels
Suddenly rise, though the
Sky is still cloudless,
For rain has been falling
Far off at their fountains:

[3] Rufus M. Jones, *Fundamental Ends of Life*, p. 106.

So hearts that are fainting,
Grow full to o'erflowing,
And they that behold it
Marvel, and know not
That God at their fountains
Far off has been raining.[4]

The final conviction about God's dealings with us which some of us have reached is this. We believe that anyone who honestly wants to hear God's voice and have His help can do so. Of course there are some individuals who, gifted with superb spiritual powers, hear the divine messages more clearly and more constantly than their companions do. There are other individuals who, subjecting themselves to long and patient discipline, finally develop an unusual power to "think God's thoughts after Him." Such men and women become the religious leaders of their generation, or even of the race. The ordinary individual must not expect to repeat the supreme religious experiences of men like Isaiah and Jesus—least of all to do so the first time he makes an effort. Neither must he expect to win his sense of God

[4] Henry W. Longfellow.

and his understanding of God's will in exactly the same way in which these other men did. In some cases the conviction of a divine call and the discovery of a divinely appointed task come with the suddenness and the overmastering power implied in the accounts given of Isaiah and Paul. In other cases all a man hears is a "still, small Voice," and all he feels is a deepening conviction that he is on the right path and that he is not walking it alone. The experience of hearing God's voice and discovering His will is as individual a thing as the experience of finding friendship or sharing love.

But when we have admitted all this, the great truth is still to be spoken. God is seeking us even more eagerly than we are seeking Him. Any man who wants to hear God's voice can—sooner or later, and in his own way—invariably hear it. That was Jesus' unshaken conviction. It is the continuing experience of our race. "Everyone that asketh receiveth. Everyone that seeketh findeth. To everyone that knocketh it shall be opened."

O Lord of love, to right my lot
Naught but Thy presence can avail,
Yet on the road Thy steps are not
Nor on the sea Thy sail.
My "How?" and "When?" Thou dost not heed,
But come down Thine own secret stair;
That Thou mayest answer all my need,
Yea, every bygone prayer.[5]

[5] George MacDonald.

Chapter VII

DOES GOD HAVE A PURPOSE FOR INDIVIDUALS?

I

In some cases a divine purpose seems fairly clear. Here, for example, is a striking passage from the autobiography of Dr. Grenfell:

> One night in 1885 I was returning from seeing a patient who lived in an outlying section of London. On a vacant lot near Shadwell I noticed a large tent, and out of curiosity I entered. I found myself in an evangelistic meeting conducted by Moody and Sankey. It was all new to me, and when a tiresome person began to make a long prayer I decided to leave. But suddenly the leader (who as I learned afterward was D. L. Moody) called out to the audience, "Let us sing a hymn

> while our brother finishes his prayer." His practical way of handling that situation interested me, and I stayed the service out. When I finally left, it was with the determination either to abandon religion entirely or else make a real effort to do what I thought Christ would do. With a mother like mine that choice could have but one issue. My mother had always been my ideal of unselfish love. So I made up my mind to do what I thought Christ would do if He were in my place.[1]

There were the simple events and the quiet decisions of forty years ago. But see what has flowed from them. The life-work of one of the most useful men of our generation. The release from pain of thousands of poor folk all over Labrador. The organization of a system of philanthropies that promises to remake one of the neediest corners of the world. Are all these things the result of coincidence? Did Grenfell happen to decide to attempt Christ-like service, and then happen to follow the

[1] W. T. Grenfell, *A Labrador Doctor*, pp. 44, 45.

course he has followed? Is lucky chance responsible for it all? Granted that no answer to these questions can be proved in a mathematical sense. Some of us turn from the study of this life and its enormous influence for good with the ineradicable feeling that coincidence cannot wholly account for it. We believe that God had a purpose for this man, a definite and a significant use for his abilities. Grenfell found this plan and fitted his life into it. Only time can reveal the full significance of the result.

Our convictions on this point are strengthened when we study our own experience. We may not be able to detect any large or sustained divine plan for our career, but there are many smaller situations which we hesitate to explain on the easy theory of coincidence. For one thing, most of us discover when we look back that there were distinct and important preparations for experiences far in the future. Part of the training we had in youth proved decades later to fit us for the entirely different career life forced upon us. Some of the con-

victions we gained in one period of life proved in the course of time to bring us victory in wholly unforeseen difficulties.

Similarly the disappointments that came to us proved more than once blessings in disguise. For a time they seemed walls of cruel frustration. Then, in a moment of far vision, we caught glimpses of the goal toward which we were blindly moving, and these walls of frustration revealed themselves as walls of kindly guidance. In one form or another this experience has come to a surprising number of people, many of whom would never think of revealing it to outsiders. Was this luck and nothing more? As the years pass and as our knowledge of life widens, some of us find it increasingly difficult to say so. A college student once confessed to an inquiring professor, "God has stepped into my life, He has done it more than once, and He has done it very perceptibly." Many of us, looking back over our own past, are compelled to make the same confession. Someone wiser than we are seems to have had a hand in our affairs.

II

When we attempt, however, to think ourselves clear on this matter of God's purpose for individuals, several puzzling questions force themselves upon the mind. The most obvious one is this. When there are so many people in the world, how can God be concerned with each one separately? More than one hundred million human beings in the United States alone. Beyond our own land uncounted millions more—white and black, red and yellow and brown. Perhaps a total of eighteen hundred million individuals on the Earth to-day. But if God is concerned with men and women in our time He must have been equally concerned with them in the past. Three generations to a century, and how far back do the centuries run? When we begin to compute the number of human beings who have crept into existence since our racial history began, and when we go on to say that God is concerned with individual lives, we find our theory involves serious mathematical difficulties. Confronted by such a situation it is not

surprising that many people to-day turn to the easier belief that God has a purpose for the human race as a whole but no purpose for the individuals who make up the race. "God," these people say to us, "is like a general who leads a vast army on a long campaign. The general has an objective for the army as a whole, and strives to lead it from one victory to the next. But the individual soldiers who make up that army are unknown to the general, and survive or perish without attracting his attention. It is the army rather than the solitary private that the general thinks about. So God is concerned with the race as a whole, but not with individuals." Is there any reply to such an argument?

For your answer go out and look at the stars. If the night is clear you will be able to see about four thousand with your naked eye. If you study the stars through a telescope you will be able to catch glimpses of thousands more. If you slip a photographic plate under the eye-piece of the telescope and study the picture developed from it you will see still more.

Astronomers tells us that the number of stars in our galaxy is certainly one thousand million, and as one modern scientist quaintly adds "the number may be twice as great." But around all those stars, numerous as they are, is a vast, unseen power which we call natural law. It impinges on them all, holding them in certain orbits and making our stellar world a thing of perfect order rather than endless confusion. In a very real sense, within that unseen power these hosts of stars "live and move and have their being."

Suppose, now, you stop thinking of God as a semi-material creature localized on a throne in a far-away heaven. Suppose you begin to think of Him as a Mind and a Power-for-Good permeating our entire universe, as that reality we call natural law permeates the stellar world. When we think of God in these terms it is not hard to believe that He holds and surrounds us all, and that in Him we human creatures "live and move and have our being." Neither is it hard to believe that His infinite, all-encompassing mind knows

what happens to each one of us, and forever strives to guide each one of us into the wise path of His choice. Basil King has stated this modern conception of God with unusual vividness:

> There was a time when it was hard for me to believe that a God who was busy with the immensities of the universe could come down to such trivial affairs as mine. To the Three-in-One in the far-off heaven I must be a negligible thing, except on the few occasions when I forced myself on the divine attention. But suppose God is an infinite Mind, bathing me round and round with His thought as the sea bathes the innumerable objects within its depths. To such a God nothing would be small. No one thing would be further removed from His attention than any other. When an object is immersed in the ocean the ocean has no extra trouble closing round it. The object may be as small as a grain of dust or as big as a battleship—to the water it is all the same. I am immersed

> in the infinite Mind, closed round by it. It gives God no extra trouble to think of me, my work, and my desires. By the very nature of God's being He can do nothing else.[2]

As long as we picture God in terms of a general leading an army, many intellectual difficulties will bewilder us when we try to conceive of His interest in and His purpose for individuals. But when we say with a great thinker of the past, "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit, and whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" most of those questions will answer themselves.

Another difficulty which troubles many people to-day as they think about God's purpose and guidance is this. We all have—unless our deepest feelings delude us completely—some measure of control over our decisions and our courses of action. Our inheritance may be given us, and our environment may prove to be beyond our control, but in the last analysis we have—at least occasionally—the power of

[2] Basil King, *The Conquest of Fear*, pp. 51, 52.

directing our thoughts and ideals and thus determining within certain limits the precise path we shall follow. As someone shrewdly observed years ago, "Other people may be responsible for what we are to-day: we ourselves are responsible for what we are trying to be to-morrow." This measure of freedom means, of course, that there is an uncontrollable and unpredictable element in every human life, as far as outside guidance and influence are concerned. In the final analysis we make our own decision where we shall live, what we shall do, with whom we shall associate, and what ideals we shall follow. How can such a situation be reconciled with our theory of God's purpose and guidance? Suppose some individual, for reasons best known to himself, decides to move in a direction wholly different from the one which God desires. Does God's purpose for that man break down, or does God overpower the man and literally crowd him into the path of the divine choice? It is fairly simple to picture natural law guiding and controlling the stars. It is entirely different to try to picture

God controlling the actions of millions of human beings each one of whom has a certain power of self-determination.

But here again the difficulties are not insuperable. Think of the scene you might find to-day in any of the harbors or waterways along our coast. There are a dozen vessels, each sailing in a different direction. Each captain has the power to choose his own course and set his sails accordingly. Yet all the time, beneath those different vessels with their different destinations, flows a steady, silent tide. Hour after hour it sweeps consistently in a certain direction, irrespective of the notice of landsmen or the desire of sailors. Some ships fight against that tide, driving themselves stubbornly against its quiet and persistent strength. Other vessels catch its favoring drift occasionally, and for a brief hour are carried onward by its power. Still other captains study the tide, chart its movement and its exact direction, and then yield their vessel to its vast energy. There, some of us believe, is a picture of God's relation to human lives. Each

one of us has the ability to choose his own course, set his own sails, and make his way—slow or fast—to the haven of his desire. But through this world of ours pours a steady, silent tide—the tide of God's purpose for the race and for individuals. Men have been studying that tide for centuries, and they have finally concluded that it is always pushing in the direction of truth and wisdom and love. Whenever you and I begin to live at our best, meeting our problems with our best intelligence and our bravest courage, we yield ourselves to the great tide of God. Whenever we begin to think and work for others rather than for ourselves alone, we let the vast current sweep us forward to the haven of its own wise choice.

God's purpose for the world? It is a reality, evident to anyone who will study the major drifts of history. God's purpose for individuals? It is a reality, discovered and shared the moment we put our lives on their own highest level. The ultimate haven toward which we move? We cannot discover it in advance.

We do not know when we shall reach it, or how many obstacles we may encounter on the way. But the great tide carries us steadily forward, and we can trust that tide to bring us finally where God wants us to be.

When I have lain an hour watching the skies
With oaken boughs above my grassy bed,
An ocean seems to open on my eyes
With ships of cloud that linger overhead.
And argosies I see and navies brave
With flame of flags and pomp of pennons dressed—
Triumphant galleons freighted to the rail
Seeking their harbor with extended sail.
And we who steer and tack, struggle and mourn,
To win a point or round a promontory,
Nursing the shore and angling with the wind,
We too sweep toward some goal insensibly
Like those slow-moving treasures of the sky.[3]

There is one more difficulty which puzzles many people to-day. They find, both in their own experience and the experience of their friends, that circumstance and coincidence play an immense part in human affairs. One man, lucky beyond any possible desert, enjoys health and prosperity from his youth. Another man,

[3] John Jay Chapman.

equally deserving on any basis of inner worth and outer effort, encounters bad luck instead of good. His health is wrecked by diseases he cannot control, his wealth is dissipated by the mistakes of other people, and finally his achievements are cut short by premature sickness and death. No longer can we believe as men once did that such situations are deliberately devised by God. Our modern view of life and experience makes a place, and a large place, for the indeterminate and bewildering factor of coincidence. How can such a scheme of things be adjusted to the belief that God has a purpose for individuals? Or are we to confess frankly that fate and circumstance occasionally interrupt God's plans?

That is exactly what we confess. But we go on to point out that God never deserts us when His initial plan for our career is interrupted. Immediately He forms a new plan, constantly adjusting His purposes to the changing situations with which both He and we have to deal. Perhaps an illustration will make this point

clear. Here is a surgeon whose deepest hope is that his son will succeed him in his profession and his practice. For years every effort is made to interest that boy in surgery. His father takes him to visit a hospital, tells him of the fascination of outwitting disease and conquering pain, and one day lets the boy witness a major operation. The son goes through school and college, and finally to the father's immense delight enrolls in medical school. Then the incredible happens. The boy's finger is injured, the infection spreads through his hand, and finally the surgeons are forced to amputate his arm. His career as his father's successor is wrecked beyond hope of repair. But does the father abandon the boy, and leave him to shift pitifully for himself? Certainly not! At once that father begins to formulate a second set of plans for that boy's life. Even if that son cannot be an operating surgeon, he may be a professor of anatomy, or a medical scientist, or the director of a hospital. A second best, and eventually that second best may prove as satisfying to the boy and as valuable

to the world as the first best would have been.

There, some of us are convinced, is a picture of God's dealings with human lives. Anyone who watches people soon realizes that there are innumerable situations in our world which must be frustrations rather than fulfilments of the divine desire. How could God ever want to see men stricken with tuberculosis, or want to watch them wreck their best years with stupidity and sin? But when these tragedies arise you and I—and God too—do everything in our power to stop the disaster and then salvage what can be saved. We strive in a dozen ways to turn the sorry course of events in some happier direction. You say you missed God's plan for your life ten years ago? That circumstances and your own mistakes blocked the use that might have been made of your powers? But God has a second plan for you. He will reveal that second best and lead you steadily toward it as soon as you begin to make the most of yourself for Him. Why not trust Him, pluck up courage, and try again?

No soul can be forever banned,
Eternally bereft:
Whoever falls from God's right hand
Is caught into His left.[4]

III

Suppose we try to carry our thought a step further. What is it God is trying to do with human lives? Can we state, even in general terms, what His major purposes for us are?

The ancient belief in a detailed predestination, or even a detailed divine purpose, is now generally abandoned. Most of us can no longer believe that God is concerned with the precise words we uttered ten days ago, or the fact that we walked yesterday on one side of the street rather than the other. When we think of God's purposes for human lives we think in larger and more general terms. The conclusions to which some of us have come can be stated briefly and simply. We believe, to begin with, that God is always striving to use us to help other people. That is His first and most obvious purpose for each human life—to

[4] Edwin Markham.

make that life of service to others. All of us, looking back across the years, can discover one situation after another in which we were used to meet the needs of the men and women about us. The more we think about these situations the surer we are that they are not the result of coincidence. The conviction deepens in our minds that in these moments God used us, fitted us into His larger purpose for the world.

Sometimes this providential use of human lives becomes evident only after long periods of time have elapsed. Then suddenly it shines in splendor, bringing a flash of meaning into the apparently trivial incidents of long ago. During her youth Alice Freeman Palmer, once president of Wellesley, spent some time teaching a class of small girls recruited from a tenement district. One day the idea came to her to ask these children, pitifully dirty and unpromising, to find something beautiful in their dingy world and then the next week tell the rest of the class about it. When the next week came one small girl said slowly, "I ain't found nuttin' beautiful where I lives, 'cept the sun-

shine on our baby's curls." Years later, long after Mrs. Palmer's untimely death, her husband was lecturing at a university in the west. His hostess that night could hardly wait to tell him that she had once been a member of a class of small girls taught by Mrs. Palmer. She said, "I can remember that your wife once asked all of us to find something lovely in the rather unpromising neighborhood where we lived, and that the next week I came saying that the only beautiful thing I had found was the glint of the sunlight on my little sister's curls. But that suggestion your wife made was the turning-point in my life. Then and there I began looking for beauty, and I have found it everywhere ever since." God's purpose for individual lives? Some of us are sure we see it there. We believe this young teacher was used by God to meet the need of those children.

A second conviction some of us have reached is that God is always striving to bring us to the particular place and the particular career in which we can do most for others. He not only

seeks to use us day by day in the locality in which we happen to be. He also strives to lead us to the situation and the work in which our efforts for others will be most valuable. Suppose we confess frankly that there are many human lives in which such an element of sustained and significant guidance is not clear. We all know men and women who, as a result of sin or stupidity or sheer coincidence, never succeed in making an adequate use of their abilities. We say they never "get into the right place." But when we have made this admission, we must go on to point out that there are other lives which seem literally maneuvered into the position which, as later events show, uses their power in an almost incredible way.

Consider the experience of Abraham Lincoln. Few people realize in what a strange fashion his career was repeatedly redirected until finally, in ways that no one would ever have foreseen, he was thrust into the Presidency in America's hour of supreme need. "Lincoln went to the Black Hawk War a cap-

tain, and through no fault of his own returned a private. That was the end of his military career. Then his country store failed completely, 'winked out' as he used to say. The surveyor's compass and chain with which he earned his living for a time were finally sold to pay his debts. He was defeated in his first campaign for the Legislature, defeated in his first attempt to be nominated for Congress, defeated in his application to be appointed Commissioner of the General Land Office, defeated in the senatorial election of 1854 in Illinois, defeated in his aspirations for the Vice-Presidency in 1856 (and defeated when a nod from half a dozen politicians would have brought him success), and defeated again in the senatorial elections of 1858. Yet 1861 found him in the White House."[5] Was it luck that led Lincoln through that maze? Was it happy coincidence that gave him to America? Some of us can never think so. We believe that God found him, trained him, led him through one crossroad after another, and

[5] J. G. Nicolay, *A Short Life of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 552.

finally put him in the place which probably no one else in his generation could have filled.

There is one more conviction which some of us hold. We believe that God is always trying to train and develop us, seeking to perfect our powers by subjecting us to the varied disciplines of life. Of course it is easy to carry this theory too far, and ascribe to God's desire unhappy situations which we ourselves ought to eradicate. We all meet men and women who persist in saying that the strain and bitterness of their own home is God's doing, a hard discipline sent by Him to teach them patience and resignation. Meantime every unprejudiced neighbor realizes that this domestic unhappiness is traceable to the weakness and the stupidity of the parents themselves, and that the situation must be a tragedy to God as it certainly is to men. Long experience has shown that it is dangerously easy to justify our own failures by shifting the responsibility onto God's shoulders, and then murmuring "divine discipline."

Yet when all is said there are other cases,

and a surprisingly large number of them, that reveal a wise and loving education continued throughout the years. In a recent volume Dr. Coffin quotes the experience of a man of our own day:

> As the years passed he had to bear a series of devastating disappointments. Much of his wealth was swept away. Then his home-circle was sadly broken. Then his artistic ability, on which he had depended for both stimulus and occupation, was taken from him. Yet at the end of his life this man used to say that no matter how other people felt about their career, he was sure that his own had been an education of a deliberate and loving kind. And he added that the day when he realized this—saw that every incident in his life had had some deep and intentional value for him—was one of the happiest days he had ever known.[6]

Granted that some of our own experiences can

[6] H. S. Coffin, *What Is There in Religion?* p. 66.

never be explained or justified in this clear fashion. As we look back over the years most of us gain glimpses of what seems a wise and loving education. After all, our hard work did bring us strength. Our disappointments did teach patience. Difficulties and problems did rouse our courage and quicken our intelligence. Can this be the answer to the riddle of existence? Is this life a slow and deliberate education for an ampler life beyond? That is the faith to which the years have finally brought unnumbered people.

We cannot look beyond
  The spectrum's mystic bar,
Beyond the violet light
  Yea, other lights there are,
And waves that touch us not,
  Voyaging far.

Vast, ordered forces whirl
  Invisible, unfelt;
Their language less than sound,
  Their names unspelt.
Suns cannot brighten them
  Nor white heat melt.

Here in the clammy dark
We dig, as dwarfs for coal;
Yet One Mind fashioned it
And us, a luminous whole:
As lastly thou shalt see
Thou, O my soul![7]

[7] Grace Wilkinson.

Chapter VIII

HOW MUCH WILL GOD DO TO HELP US?

I

Just after the War a California minister preached a sermon on the interesting topic, "God's Hand Seen in Seven Incidents of the World War." This minister claimed that on seven different occasions Germany had victory within her grasp, but that in each instance God intervened and snatched it away. Here is one of the seven incidents quoted:

> On April 22, 1915, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the Germans at Ypres turned loose their first cloud of poison gas. The Allied soldiers were wholly unprepared and fell in heaps. The way was thus clear for the Germans to rush

through the broken lines, seize the Channel ports, and win the war. But what happened? The hour for that attack had been determined by the German meteorologists, who had assured the general in command that the direction of the wind was favorable and would not change for at least thirty-six hours. It would thus carry the gas far beyond the Allied lines, and leave the way clear for the Germans themselves to advance in safety. But as a matter of fact the gas was suddenly whirled about and flung on the Germans themselves. Gasping and strangling they staggered by the thousands to their death. The strangest circumstance of all was that the direction of the wind changed only in the small sector where the gas had been turned loose. Dr. Schmaus, the leading meteorologist of the German army, declared afterward that in forty years of experience he had never seen the wind act so strangely. How do we explain the situation? God worked a miracle. He

swung the wind around in that little area and hurled the German gas on the Germans themselves. God is the Father of the wind. The Bible speaks in 116 places of the things He does with it.

How do such theories impress most of us? If we are honest we must confess they leave us skeptical. Without raising the question whether God would ever fling poison gas on anybody, we find ourselves wondering whether He ever interferes with the action of the wind in any such arbitrary and miraculous fashion. The results of modern scientific investigation indicate that such erratic occurrences literally never happen. As far as we can see, the realm of Nature is a thoroughly orderly and reliable place in which developments follow each other with unvarying precision. The tides rise and fall with such unerring accuracy that we can prophesy to-day just when it will be high water in any harbor on earth a century hence. Our globe turns on its axis and sweeps onward through space with such unfaltering regularity that astronomers can tell decades in advance

just when the sun will appear over the horizon on a given morning.

Even the comets, once thought utterly unpredictable in their movements, now reveal themselves as steady wayfarers through the heavens. Halley's Comet, for example, terrified our forbears times without number, and was regarded by them as a special warning brandished by God where everyone could see it. Now we know that Halley's Comet has always been moving through space with perfect regularity, and that it has no more to do with divine warnings than does the morning sun. The Comet was last visible from our Earth in 1910, and now it is rushing away from the limits of our vision at inconceivable speed. When it reaches a point thirty-three times as distant from the sun as we are, it will swerve automatically in its course and stream back toward us. At a predetermined time in 1985 it will again be visible in our sky, and our children and grandchildren will stare at it with a mild curiosity. When modern science thus reveals a universe of unbroken law and unfalter-

ing sequences, we need not be surprised to find intelligent people shaking their heads skeptically when anyone speaks of divine manipulations of the wind. The men of the Middle Ages might have looked for these miraculous happenings in the realm of Nature. Most of us do not.

II

But do these iron laws of Nature leave us helpless? Do they rob us of our power to influence, directly or indirectly, the threatened course of events? A moment's thought will show that they do not. As a matter of fact all of us are constantly pitting one force against another, driving one law in opposition to another, and in this way gaining a certain control over the sequences of life. Perhaps an illustration will make this point clear. One day last summer you were standing on the seashore watching a skilful skipper bring his boat to her mooring. The wind happened to be blowing in exactly the wrong direction, and left to itself would speedily have carried that little craft far out to sea. But the skipper was not alarmed.

He pulled his sail in tight, tacked back and forth, and finally zigzagged up to his mooring in the very face of the wind. How was he able to accomplish that unnatural result? Nothing that he did—or could do—changed in the slightest the direction of the wind. Its direction and its precise velocity had been predetermined by situations over which no one of us has the slightest control. But that skipper skilfully pitted one force against another—the resistance of his close-hauled sail against the thrust of the breeze—and by so doing he changed the natural course of events and brought his boat to a spot it would never have reached without his directive intelligence. Day after day all of us thus recombine the rigid powers of the world of Nature and redirect its blind energies. We never change its movements or disrupt its laws. But we do learn to control them, and in this way we achieve a certain mastery over the mechanisms that move blindly everywhere about us.

Suppose we think of God's activity in these same terms. He too lives and works amid these

rigid and relentless laws. For Him as for us two and two make four, heat expands and cold contracts, and the great cycle of birth and growth and death continues its steady sequence. It was on this pattern that God built our world, and now, for Him as well as for us, the vast mechanisms maintain their unfaltering movements. But in this universe of law God is, we believe, a center of directive power. By pitting one force against another God manipulates these rigid sequences in such a way that His purposes are slowly fulfilled. In other words, God works through law rather than in spite of it. Where, now, does He work? In the realm of Nature, or in the realm of human life, or in both?

III

It is theoretically possible that God might work directly in the realm of Nature. He might at any time interrupt the normal processes He finds there, and in an arbitrary and miraculous fashion achieve new results in a new way. If God had the power to establish

the mechanisms of the natural world and put them in operation He certainly must have the power to stop them or alter their movements if He so desires. As the minister in California would insist, it is a small thing for an Almighty God to change the direction of the wind for a few moments at a particular spot on the battle-line in France.

But the question is not what God might do, but what God does do. As a matter of fact, not of theory, does God interrupt arbitrarily and miraculously the processes of Nature? Experience and observation give a clear and distinct answer. God does not. As far as the human race has been able to discover after centuries of existence here, God lets the mechanisms of the natural world roll along their relentless course. Far beneath the surface of the Earth developments begin among the rock strata which in the end will bring on an earthquake attended by a ghastly loss of life. God might interfere at the beginning of the process and thus prevent the final disaster. But obviously God does not. In the invisible realm

of microörganisms a growth process starts which finally produces a germ of fearful malignancy. God might interfere and stop the influenza epidemic at its incipiency. But clearly God does not. Whatever theoretical views we may hold about God's relation to the world of Nature, most of us act in daily life on the assumption that the processes of Nature will follow their blind and predetermined course. We no longer ask God to stop the rain. We have an instinctive feeling that the storm will continue till weather conditions change.

If God does not interfere directly with the processes of Nature, does He work anywhere in our world? Some of us are convinced that He does. We believe that His sphere of operation is the human realm, and that He is forever at work in the minds and hearts of men striving to affect their ideals and their decisions. By thus influencing human beings God eventually gains control not only over human lives but also over some developments in the natural world. Why God should thus limit His operations, and why He should thus work indi-

rectly, we cannot explain. We can only say that experience and observation indicate that these are His methods. There is a passage in the autobiography of Dr. Grenfell which illustrates these ideas with singular vividness:

> In 1889 I crossed the Atlantic in a small schooner which I was told would never reach Labrador. But there I finally landed. The conditions we encountered were deplorable. When a fisherman fell sick or when accidents occurred the people there had no medical assistance whatever. I recall one of the first cases I treated. Late in the evening of our first day in a harbor on the coast I noticed near our schooner a miserable bunch of boards that served as a boat. Sitting silent in it was a half-clad, brown-haired, brown-faced figure. After long hesitation this man spoke. "Be you a real doctor?" When I said that was what I tried to be, he answered, "Us hasn't got no money, but there's a sick man ashore if so be you'd come and see him." I found the patient in a tiny sod-

covered hovel, its one window made of odd fragments of glass. The floor was of pebbles from the beach, and the earthen walls were damp and chilly. There were half a dozen rude wooden bunks around the room, and in one corner were six neglected children. A man dying of pneumonia was coughing his life out in the darkness of a lower bunk, while a pitifully dressed woman was giving him a little cold water out of an old spoon. During that first visit to Labrador I treated nine hundred people who would never have seen a doctor had I not gone there. That settled the question of my life-work. I volunteered for service in Labrador, and I've been asking for more volunteers ever since.[1]

Granted that God might have solved the problem in those fishermen's homes by miraculously destroying the germs of pneumonia, tuberculosis, and infantile paralysis. The obvious fact is that He did not, and that He does not, work

[1] W. T. Grenfell, *A Labrador Doctor*, pp. 120, 121.

that way. He waited till He found human hands and minds through which He could work. Then and only then did He act.

Many people of our time, hearing a theory like this, jump to the conclusion that if God works only through people His operations must be sadly limited in scope. Such an idea is wholly false. Through human agencies God can finally achieve momentous redirections of events in many spheres. Working through men like Dr. Grenfell He can ultimately remake the very conditions of existence in Labrador. Working through the people whose lives touch yours and mine He can quickly redirect the course of our career. "We pray for God's help, but we little realize in how many strange ways it comes to us unsolicited through the busy days. The spoken or printed word that brings its note of cheer just when we were most discouraged, the unwelcome delay that changes a momentous choice, the laughter of a little child, the words of a song floating in at a window—in all these and countless other ways our

spirits are impressed and our acts are guided." [2] If God had the power to work through human agencies every one of those leadings is possible. The word that brought us our much-needed courage may have come as the result of an impulse God put into the mind of one of our friends. The unwelcome delay that proved to have such momentous consequences may have been forced upon us by someone who, all unconsciously, was doing God's will. The laughter of the little child, and the words of the song echoing through the window, may have been God's effort in our behalf, an effort carried on indirectly through other people. When we say that God leaves the realm of Nature to follow its own course and does His work through human agencies, we do not rule out the possibility of significant divine help. The way is still open for God to do "exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh *in us.*"

[2] H. S. Coffin.

IV

Assuming that this is God's way of working, have we any idea how He influences human lives? What is it that He does to help us? The conclusions which some of us have reached are these. We believe, to begin with, that God helps us and guides us by giving us moments of clear vision. The experience on which we base this conviction is familiar to almost everyone. We meet a bewildering situation or a difficult decision. In spite of all our efforts we find ourselves inwardly confused and uncertain, unable to see what we should do or how we should do it. We ask for God's help, and what happens? Slowly a mood of quietness steals over our spirit, then the puzzling elements in the situation begin to lose their bewildering aspect, and finally we begin to see clearly the path of immediate duty. Moments of clear vision, and when they come how many of our problems silently solve themselves! Again and again this experience has come to honest seekers. Some of us can never interpret it as coincidence, or feel that it was

the automatic product of changing brain states. To us it means God.

The sky was broidered o'er with cloud today,
Silver and white, somber and pale, golden and gray.
Pinnacled fanes were there, and little flocks at play.
Then as I watched there came a breeze
And lo! a sudden rift,
And there peeped out at me
One little magic patch of innocence.
O purging wind
Blow down the skies again!
Scatter the cloud-drift of my mind,
The strangely sculptured vapors of my brain,
And let God's blue
Shine through!
One little space of clear
That steadfast smiles between the moving thought
All in gray mazes wrought,
And strikes a blessed stillness to my heart.[3]

A second way in which God helps us is by bringing definite ideas and impulses within the circle of our attention. The picture by which psychologists now suggest the activity of the mind is familiar to most of us. Moment by moment a stream of sensations, thoughts, impulses, memories, and ideas flows through the

[3] Evelyn Underhill.

mind. On the surface of that turbulent flood is a single spot of brilliance, as though a searchlight were shining down through the dark. We call that circle of radiance our attention. As the instants pass, different ideas and impulses rise suddenly into that spot of light. They linger there momentarily, and then slip out into the darkness beyond. We say they go "out of the mind," "pass into oblivion." No one can explain fully why the ideas and impulses that thus emerge into the circle of attention do so. In some cases they seem to be brought there by laws of memory, suggestion, or association of ideas. In other cases there seems no special reason why one idea rather than another should suddenly flash into brilliance before us. But moment by moment the ideas and impulses emerge there, and once there they tend—in accordance with familiar laws of the mind—to be translated into action.

Some of us believe that God has the power to bring ideas and impulses into the circle of attention. Sometimes it is an old ideal that God thus flashes before us. We find it point-

ing us again to a standard of thought and life taught years ago, but years ago forgotten. Or sometimes it is a new conviction that God lifts into our mind. The constituent elements of that new belief may have been in our consciousness for long periods of time, but now they are suddenly combined into a new synthesis and a new truth dawns in splendor on our waiting spirit. It was some such experience that Jesus had when God revealed to Him the new insights and glimpses of reality which have been ever since the priceless spiritual possessions of the race. It is this experience which, in far smaller degree, comes to numberless men and women of our time. They carry their quest for truth as far as they can and then the final insight is "given." All this sheer coincidence? A happy result that would have come anyway from the mechanical processes of the brain and the body? Some of us can never make that interpretation of the deepest experiences of the human spirit.

> The sphere of the supernal powers
> Impinges on this world of ours,

> The breath of a diviner air
> Blows down the answer to our prayer.
> Then all our sorrow, pain, and doubt
> A great compassion clasps about,
> With smile of trust and folded hands
> The passive soul in waiting stands
> To feel, as flowers the sun and dew,
> The one true Life its own renew.[4]

A third way in which God helps us is by putting into the mind of someone else the impulse to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. In most cases God can give us the deliverance we need by bringing a moment of clear vision, and then sending an impulse that starts us on the right path. But there are times when the deliverance we crave is beyond the limits of our own strength and power. In these situations God strives to bring us that deliverance by waking in the mind of some other person the impulse to do for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. This was the way in which God answered the prayers of the needy fishermen in Labrador—by waking in the mind of an English doctor the willingness to spend and

[4] John G. Whittier.

be spent in their service. This is the way in which God meets day after day the need of thousands of the people about us. Few of them confess their experience, and still fewer look behind the sequence of events that has finally brought their deliverance. But there God is, leading one man to answer the prayers of another. One of our mission boards has recently published this incident:

> A sudden emergency arose in one of our mission stations in China. The leader there sent a cablegram to the home office here, stating that certain funds were desperately needed and adding that he and the men with him were praying that God would put into the mind of someone in America the impulse to give what was required. When the secretary of the home office went to his desk the following morning he found the message waiting there. Repeatedly during that day he added his prayers to the prayers of the men in China. Late in the afternoon an elderly stranger entered the office and inquired

for the secretary. With some hesitation he asked if there were any special emergency on the mission field which a gift from him might meet. The secretary replied by laying the cablegram in his hands. He read it slowly, and then told his story. As he and his wife were making their usual prayer together that morning, the conviction was borne in on them both that they ought to do something for the cause of Christ more generous than they had done hitherto. All day this persistent sense of obligation followed this man, and on his way home he dropped into the office of the mission board to see if he could really be of service. Now he stood ready to answer the prayers of the men in China.

What would have happened had that man failed to respond to his own inner prompting toward kindness? The same thing that happens when you and I fail in that regard. The prayers of other people must go unanswered.

God must find someone else to take our opportunity.

All this suggests the answer to a question which great numbers of people are asking today—What happens when we pray? The first thing that happens, and the obvious thing, is that certain natural and reflex benefits accrue from the mere act of growing quiet and then giving expression to our own inward feeling. But that is not all that happens. When we open our lives in our own way and with utter sincerity, help flows in from a Source beyond. God may leave the processes of Nature to follow their blind and unfaltering course, but He does "restore our soul." Our attitude of receptivity and aspiration opens the way for Him to do what He has always been ready to do. He gives us a new poise, a new insight, a new perspective on ourselves and our problems. He brings ideas, old and new, within the circle of our attention. He strives to enlist others in our behalf, as He has been doing ever since our need arose. These are no mistaken fancies,

no flights of a religiously inclined imagination. They are the crystallized experience of Jesus, and of ten thousand times ten thousand who have followed His way of life. "Ask, and ye shall receive. Seek, and ye shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Chapter IX

CAN A PERSON WHO HAS NO SENSE OF GOD GAIN ONE?

I

One of the most vivid poems of recent years is the verse in which Thomas Hardy describes his own inability to gain a sense of God. He calls the poem "The Impercipient," and the subtitle suggests that he wrote it after an unrewarding experience at a cathedral service.

That with this bright believing band
I have no claim to be,
That faiths by which my comrades stand
Seem fantasies to me,
And mirage-mists their Shining Land,
Is a strange destiny.

I am like a gazer who should mark
An inland company
Standing up fingered with "Hark, hark,
The glorious distant sea!"
And feel "Alas, 'tis but yon dark
And wind-swept pine to me."

Yet I would bear my shortcomings
With meet tranquillity
But for the charge that blessed things
I'd rather not have be;
O doth a bird deprived of wings
Go earth-bound wilfully?

Great numbers of people share Hardy's predicament. They want a sense of God's reality and nearness, but try as they will they cannot get it. Meantime other people, usually sure of God, have long periods of uncertainty in which He seems little more than a philosophical possibility and a vague one at that. If God is really here, why are so many people unable to sense His presence? Why do the best of us have frequent days of doubt?

We can suggest our answer to these questions by quoting the result of an investigation recently made off the coast of Newfoundland. The United States government sent one of its vessels there to study the fog-banks which are such a menace to shipping. With the help of ingenious instruments devised by the Bureau of Standards the investigators reached some new and interesting conclusions about fog. In

a fog-bank three feet wide, six feet high, and one hundred feet long there is apparently only about one-seventh of a glassful of water. That small amount is divided into some sixty thousand million tiny drops, each one perhaps four ten-thousandths of an inch in diameter. Almost invisible of course, and yet when those minute fog-particles settle down over the Atlantic they can speedily blot out such vast and indubitable realities as the sea, the sky, and even the sun itself.

It is a matter of common experience that hindrances quite as insignificant can obliterate the splendors of the mental and the spiritual world. A slight physical discomfort will spoil the symphony concert which we had been anticipating for weeks. We say the narrow chair "took away" the beauty of the music. Similarly a trivial anxiety lurking in the mind will rob companionship with our friends of its expected charm. We find ourselves wondering what has happened to these individuals, and why their attractiveness has so suddenly disappeared. Of course the beauty is still in the

symphony and the splendor is still in our friendships. But we ourselves are "out of tune," temporarily unable to discover and appreciate these spiritual realities.

This is, many of us believe, the situation we meet so often in the realm of religious experience. God is here, as great and unchanging as the sea, the sun, and the sky. But tiny hindrances, like those fog-particles off Newfoundland, blur our view or obliterate our vision entirely. Sometimes it is physical or nervous fatigue that robs us of our sense of God. Sometimes it is hidden anxiety or secret sin. More curious still, there seem to be certain individuals who live in a perennial fog. Their mental and spiritual makeup is such that they find it almost impossible, even under the most favorable circumstances, to gain a clear sense of the divine. We all realize there are some people who cannot respond to color values, and others who cannot appreciate the intervals of the musical scale. Why should we be surprised to find that there are occasional individuals whose religious capacities are limited? The plain fact

is that only in rare instances does the life-process succeed in producing a spiritual genius, just as only in rare instances it succeeds in producing an artistic genius. And it is only occasionally—in sudden moments of quick, far vision—that you and I pierce the fog and catch clear glimpses of the Divine. Many of us recall James Russell Lowell's confession:

> I, that still pray at morning and at eve,
> Thrice in my life perhaps have truly prayed;
> Thrice, stirred below my conscious self, have felt
> That perfect disenthrallment which is God.

II

Suppose you want a clearer or a more frequent sense of God. How can you get it? There are three facts all of us would do well to bear in mind before we begin our quest at all. The first is that the experience which we seek will contain no strange, spectacular, or bizarre elements. It will be something as quiet as discovering friendship, as normal as responding to human love.

Many people, particularly young people, go astray at this point. When anyone men-

tions a sense of God they instinctively picture some curious occurrence—seeing a vision, hearing a voice, finding one's desires altered, or feeling the current of one's purpose swing suddenly in a new direction. Suppose we confess that in some instances the experience of finding God has been accompanied by these striking manifestations. Suppose we admit that Biblical accounts of "seeing God" are almost invariably couched in spectacular terms. The experience that comes to most of us to-day involves no such elements. It is a quiet and a progressive discovery—the ever-deepening realization that beauty, strength, and a power for right are here with us, and that they point back to Someone greater than we are, Someone in whose vastness lie the sources and the issues of our life.

Here, for example, is the way in which two of the dominant figures of the last century described their sense of God. John Ruskin wrote:

> In my case there is a continual perception of Sanctity in the whole of Na-

ture. It is an instinctive awe mixed with delight, an indefinable thrill. I feel this perfectly only when I am alone, and then it often makes me shiver from head to foot with the joy and the fear of it. As when, after being away some time from the hills, I get back to the shore of a mountain river where the brown water circles among the pebbles. Or when I see again the swell of distant land against the sunset, and the first low, broken wall covered with mountain moss.[1]

Some of us well understand the experience he describes. It brought us too a vivid sense of God. The testimony of William James is quite as impressive:

> My sense of God is very vague. It is impossible to describe it or put it in words. It is something like another experience which I have constantly—finding a tune singing in the back of my mind, a tune which I can neither identify nor get rid of. Something like that is my feeling for

[1] Quoted by R. W. Sockman in *Men of the Mysteries*, p. 187.

> God. Especially at times of moral crisis it comes to me, as the sense of an Unknown Something which is backing me up. It is most indefinite to be sure, and rather faint. Yet I know that if it should cease there would be a great hush, a great void in my life.[2]

With those two statements before you, turn back to the experience of the greatest of men. The more we study it the more clearly we see that it reflects the same consciousness of companionship. Jesus says simply, "I am not alone. The Father is with me." That is the experience you and I are seeking to-day. Not something spectacular and abnormal. Rather a deepening sense of comradeship with a Friendly Spirit at the heart of life.

A second fact we would do well to keep in mind is this. The precise form in which the experience of God comes to anyone is conditioned by his temperament and his surroundings. Centuries ago a medieval mystic wrote, "There are as many unveilings of God as there

[2] Ibid., p. 91.

are saintly souls." How true, then and now! In the final analysis each one of us has his own path to God, his own set of experiences through which the sense of God is slowly borne in upon his mind. Here, for example, is a poet who has the chance to expose his sensitive spirit to the silent loveliness of the fields in spring. How does the sense of God come to him? One of our modern authors tells us:

Is it such a little thing
To find a wild-flower
Twinkling in the wild-wood
Hour after hour,
Dancing to the wind's pipe
With a happy nod?
Is it such a little thing?
I think it is God.[8]

Or here, in the sharpest contrast, is a man who lives in a city and finds himself burdened and bewildered by the incessant demands made upon him throughout the busy days. Where and how will he find God? Nature will have no opportunity to bring the revelation, but it

[8] Cale Young Rice.

does come in other ways. One of our minor poets makes this confession:

Sometimes contritely, seeking ease,
I say my sorrowful litanies,
Sometimes by the power of the Holy Ghost
I praise God with the angelic host,
But most of the time I just get through
The thousand things there are to do,
And find myself too tired to pray
When I get to bed at the end of the day.
Yet as through a covert of leaves a bird
Will be for a moment seen and heard,
So in the happy voice of a child,
The tender face of a man who smiled,
And the love of a mother, I see and hear
Through the thick of the day the God who is near.[4]

God in beauty, God in human kindness, God in the urge toward nobler things, God in the impulse for sacrificial kindness, God in the experience of inward renewal—in all these different places different people find Him. You will discover Him in your own way, a way determined by your temperament and your surroundings. In all the great experiences of life each one of us must finally walk alone.

[4] "G. M. H."

Here is one more fact all of us need to remember as we make our quest for God. The culminating experience, the sudden and sure sense of the Eternal, usually comes in an unexpected way and at an unexpected moment. It is as though our mental and spiritual powers, working for years in imperfect adjustment, suddenly slipped into unpredicted harmony. It is as though the final inspiration from without, the inspiration we had long sought in vain, were suddenly provided by an unexpected combination of circumstances. Then the fog in which we have long lived suddenly grows thin, and blue sky and golden sunlight begin to shimmer through the haze. To many young people in the teens and twenties these words will seem sheer nonsense. To most men and women in the thirties and forties, individuals who have passed through the deeper experiences of life, they will seem sober fact.

Perhaps the experience of a New England student will illustrate this point. Suddenly and in a wholly unpredictable way the sense

of God which he had often heard discussed came to him:

> In the summer of 1924 I had an experience which definitely convinced me of the reality of God. I went to visit a ranch in the west, and after leaving the train I had to ride about forty miles on horseback. It was nearly ten at night when I finally reached my destination, and the full moon was throwing a sheet of silver over everything. I had to walk a little way and cross a brook to reach the cabin where I was to sleep, and it was while I was on the way there that I had the experience of which I speak. The sky was a beautiful deep blue, and the stars were so big and bright that it seemed as if I could almost touch them. Straight before me were the Big Horn mountains, their highest peaks rising ten thousand feet. As a matter of fact those peaks were five miles away, but in that clear light they seemed to tower like a great wall before me. I had the same sensation a man has

> when he stands at the foot of a very high building and looks up along the wall to the top. Then suddenly as I gazed at those mountains, that glowing moon, and those bright stars, a great wave of feeling swept over me. I realized how little we human beings are, and how infinitely great is God—or whatever you want to call that Other Thing. From that moment I have been firmly convinced there is a God. It makes no difference to me what other people say or think. For myself I am sure.[5]

Had you told that boy in the evening that the overpowering sense of God would come to him before midnight, he would have laughed. But suddenly and unexpectedly the inner adjustment, the outward stimulus, and the long-sought experience did come. Your experience of God may well come in the same unpredictable fashion.

This fact has a special meaning for those who are trying to help modern young people through their religious difficulties. Time and

[5] From the manuscript collection of the author.

again these boys and girls wait for years without gaining a definite and convincing experience of God. They ask questions about it, read books that describe it, and then try in strange ways of their own to induce it in themselves. Often nothing happens, and then a period of intense skepticism ensues. They announce, with the familiar assurance of extreme youth, that there is no such thing as a valid sense of God, and that the people who claim to have it are victims of self-deception. In such a situation what must older people do? They must wait, wait until this climactic experience—like the experience of deep love—comes at its own time and in its own way. The ultimate developments of the human spirit can never be hurried or forced. They demand time, and then a perfect coördination of outward stimulus and inward response. We all know how true this is in the experience of human love. Why do we not understand that the same principle holds true when we attempt to find and respond to the Divine Love?

A generation ago a boy in Colgate University wrote home to his mother that he intended to "sweep God out of the universe," start again in his thinking, and thereafter take nothing for granted. But that boy was destined in time to have his long-sought experience of God. His name was Harry Emerson Fosdick. Two generations ago a Scotch lad of twenty-one who had been ordained to the ministry appeared before his presbytery to offer his resignation. He confessed in obvious distress that he had lost his faith. He was no longer sure of God, and he was utterly uncertain about immortality. But those wise friends refused to listen. They said, "You are a very young man. You will change." And George Matheson did change. Years later, after his experience of God had come, he wrote the hymn that has stirred unnumbered hearts:

O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee,
I give Thee back the life I owe
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

You have been praying that those you love may gain this priceless sense of God? This is an experience which, like all the greatest things in life, we can neither induce, manipulate, nor transfer. It is what the religious geniuses of every generation have always insisted it is—the gift of God. We must wait until in His own time and His own way He scatters our darkness and lets His light break through.

III

Let us come now to the heart of our problem. If we admit these preliminary facts, what are the things we can do to prepare ourselves for the experience of God? Granted that in the final analysis it is His gift rather than our capture, how can we fit ourselves to receive the gift as soon as it is offered? Here are three simple and practical suggestions which have proved of great help to many of us.

If you want to gain a clearer sense of God you must, to begin with, put out of your heart everything that seems to you yourself unworthy. No one else can locate for you

these secret hindrances to your higher life. What seems insincere to one man may seem beyond criticism to another, and habits that may prove harmless in one personality may prove in others cruelly injurious. Each one of us must study himself, learn to detect the faint warnings of his own conscience, and then deliberately hold himself on his own highest level. This is probably the meaning of Jesus' profound words, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." No one can explain why this should be the case, but centuries of human experience have verified Jesus' insight. The only people who win and hold the sense of God are those who live persistently at their own best.

Rufus Jones quotes this testimony from a person who had been trying for months, and trying in vain, to win a deeper sense of God:

> After a long period of jangling conflict and inner misery I finally stopped doing the insincere thing I had been doing for so long. Then the marvel happened. It was as if a great rubber-band which had

> been stretched to the breaking-point were suddenly released and then snapped back to its normal state. Everything in my world changed. Everything now seemed glorious because of its relation to some great Central Life. Henceforth nothing mattered but that Great Reality at the heart of things.[6]

You want a sense of God? Ask yourself how much you want it. Do you want it enough to drop all your grudges, "forgive seventy times seven"? Do you want it enough to seek it through a finer self-control, the control of inward thoughts as well as outward acts? Do you want it enough to pay its price in unfaltering love and kindness, love toward your enemies? "Thou shalt find Him when thou searchest after Him with all thine heart." Those words have an implication which can hardly be missed.

Here is the second suggestion. If you want to gain a sense of God repeat deliberately and

[6] In "The Mystic's Experience of God," in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

frequently whatever experiences quicken your own finer powers. Here again there is no universal method of procedure. Each one of us has his own way of rousing conscience, waking ideals, quickening aspiration, gaining a momentary consciousness of the Infinite. Each individual must develop his own technique of spiritual self-culture.

Some months ago a student came to me to ask bluntly how he could gain a convincing sense of God. I asked him if there was any experience which gave him—even for a moment—the fleeting sense of a beauty, a love, a power-for-right greater than our own. He hesitated for a long time and then said slowly, "Yes, there is. I never get it in churches. I never get it from books or lectures. But ten minutes of really great music, and I leave this world behind." There is the experience which quickens this boy's finer powers. There is the window of his soul through which he can catch faint glimpses of One who is altogether lovely. You say his window, the window of great music, would

never disclose God to you? Then listen to the testimony of a man whose temperament is entirely different. This man finds God through silence and prayer.

> Let us put by some hour of every day
> For holy things. Whether it be when dawn
> Peers through the window-pane, or when the noon
> Flames like a burnished topaz in the vault,
> Or when the thrush pours in the ear of eve
> Its plaintive melody. Some little hour
> Wherein to hold rapt converse with the soul,
> From sordidness and self a sanctuary
> Swept by the winnowing of unseen wings
> And touched by the white Light ineffable.[7]

"There are as many unveilings of God as there are saintly souls." You must find your own path to God, and then follow it persistently.

The final suggestion is this. As we make our quest for God we must remind ourselves constantly that God is forever making advances toward us—through beauty, through the powers working for right, through the strength and kindness constantly emerging within our heart, and through secret inner

[7] Clinton Scollard.

experiences we can never reveal. Many people to-day seem to overlook this truth. They speak and act as though God were trying to elude us, as though all the searching were done by human beings and from the human end. But the religious geniuses of the race draw no such picture. In Jesus' matchless parable it is the shepherd who goes hunting for the sheep. The sheep do not have to organize a search for the shepherd. Again and again the mystics of the past tell us how God found them, how vision and strength were given, how a Divine Love persistently followed after. And in our own day an anonymous poet thus sums up his deepest experience:

> I find, I walk, I love—but O the whole
> Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee!
> For Thou wert long beforetime with my soul,
> Always Thou lovedst me.

We are not the only ones concerned in this quest for comradeship. God is seeking us quite as intently as we are seeking Him. Day by day, hour by hour He makes His advances

toward us, through the splendor of the world without and the silence of the world within. If you have been seeking God for years and seeking Him in vain, suppose you deliberately drop your tired and bewildered effort. Wait, grow quiet, let God find you. He has been following and speaking all the time, but you have been too busy to hear. Why not listen rather than plead louder? Why not be found rather than seek?

Go a little apart from the noise of the world,
Go near to yourself,
Listen . . .
Music,
Pulse-beats of life,
Whispers of love,
They were there all the time
Like a brook that is under the ground.

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